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Religion, Science and Andhashraddhaa Nirmoolan Samitee

The origin of religions can be found in the psychological problems, inherent in the evolution of human mind. To solve these problems assumptions like 'it is human nature to believe' are of no help. We should start with obvious and rudimentary questions, such as 'why did men ever believe there were gods at all and why from many gods did they arrive at one supreme god?' and many more.

Religion is defined contemplatively as well as emotively. Reflectively it is said to be 'refuge of the frustrated rationalism of the savage; religion is the outcome of an effort to explain all things –physical, metaphysical and moral by analogies drawn from human society, imaginatively and symbolically considered and so on.' In short religion is a universal sociological hypothesis which is mystic only in form. According to Herbert Spencer, 'religion is recognition of a mystery pressing for interpretation.' Since the dawn of civilization man is trying to interpret the mystery of nature, presupposing that *mystery can be interpreted*. In this sense religion differs little from science. Thus conceived religion is the backward or earlier stage of science, of human quest for knowledge and truth. When enough knowledge is not available, men fall back on imagination and the result is religion. Yet the basic assumption of religious thought is that nature is a law governed system; and although the laws are given by superior power, they can be discovered. Even Einstein had said, 'God does not play dice with human beings.'

According to the affective or emotive definitions of religion, religion is a feeling of absolute dependence upon God. But even here, the question arises how is the almighty God conceived? Conception again is a rational process-the instinctive urge to discover causes of natural phenomena. Various deities-superhuman agencies of natural phenomena- were traced to one supreme God. Out of this rational process evolved the concept of the 'final cause'; rational, because it excludes miracles.

The feeling that man is dependent on imperious laws of physical universe is a secular feeling a thoroughly rationalist view. There is a sort of inverse causal relation between religion and science. Increasing knowledge of relations and functions of nature makes the feeling of dependence less poignant. Conversely absence of knowledge causes the feeling of dependence, which is born of existence, and which gets hold of the mind of man; he then surrenders to the savior of his own imagination. Man always wanted to know nature, in order to free himself from her tyranny. When he failed to attain this secular object in the prescience days, he surrendered to the almighty God. Religion, thus, is the expression of man's struggle against the tyranny of nature and there is nothing supernatural in it.

Originally the savage had an individual mystic God for every natural phenomenon. With the rise of monotheistic religion, man began to come out of spiritual wilderness of mysticism and theology became a logical system in order to rationalize anthropomorphic monotheism-the notion of an almighty being ruling the world according to reason or law. Metaphysical and moral thoughts that followed the unsuccessful attempts of early science and philosophy went into the making of monotheistic religion, particularly Christianity. Therefore even during the dark ages, reason could not be suffocated by blind faith and eventually reasserted itself in the renaissance of science and philosophy culminating into the notion of a 'law governed universe'.

Meanwhile in the atmosphere of intellectual unsettlement and skepticism, the thinking man's attention turned towards the problems of human life which were in the reach of direct observation. From this resulted the idea that the world is not a standing miracle but a law governed system was resulted. Of course the concept of law was yet teleological, an operation of the will of God. However the operation of the divine law was not a matter of blind faith and although curiosity to understand these laws was frowned upon, it could not be suppressed which finally led to the rise of modern science.

Science abolished the hiatus between inanimate nature and the organic world and proved the essential connection between the two, as life comes out of the background of nonliving matter. Life no longer remained an inexplicable category called intuition or a mysteriously purposive urge. It is a determined physical process. Science has also narrowed the hiatus between the intelligence of man and that of a primate. Experiments have shown that Chimpanzees have a high degree of intelligence enabling them to solve practical problems. But they are not capable of conceptual thought; the capacity for which language is a prerequisite. Another incentive that differentiates the human species from its biological background is the quest of freedom. Every success in biological struggle for existence can be called a conquest of freedom.

As soon as the biological form belonging to the human species became a 'thinking being', mind and thought entered into the process of organic evolution as its determining factors affecting the entire subsequent process of man's intellectual and emotional development. Earlier, before man's imagination populated nature with Gods and propitiating them, the savage tried to obtain the same results through magic. He had no idea of God or anything supernatural. This primitive atheism does not mean denial of God but simply the absence of any idea of God. The earlier Natural Religion was devised by human reason without supernatural aid or revelation. Simple deism was a rational cult as against the mysticism of the revealed religion. This primitive religion was an affair of this world and not the next; the deities were mortal and part and not the Authors of Nature.

The whole history of intellectual and emotional development of the human species has gone into the making of **human psyche** which is said to be the repository of residues antedating even the homo-sapiens. It is not a mystic entity but the subconscious part of the human mind, a biological heritage of the human race. It is the storehouse of the experiences of primitive man as well as his vertebrate animal ancestors. At one stage of the evolution of human psyche, concepts like God, heaven, angel, soul, etc. captured the imagination of people and shrewd people skillfully made use of it. The concept of God and religion is thus rooted in the human psyche but so also is reason. Human nature is not to believe but to struggle for freedom and search for truth. *But when the need for rationalizing the irrationalism of the so called revealed religion was felt the concept of reason became the doctrine of providence; i.e., God, his care and help and his vigilance over all that he has made.*

The Puritans considered men to be born sinners, wretched individuals whose best prospects were in not being born at all! They keep brooding upon their sins, faults and imperfections and become misanthropes. The orthodox Christians believed that the world was created by God in 4004 BC. It was inferred from Genesis that 'man was created at 9.00 AM on Friday, the 23rd October 4004 BC; Adam was 123 feet 9 inches tall and Eve stood 118 feet 9 inches and 9 lines. No Scientist dares arrogate such precision. The Muslims too seem to believe in the theory of Genesis. The Hindus have their own theories of creation of man. A fantastic theory tells us that a vast Lotus rose out of the navel of the Lord Brahmadev which created and held the whole universe. The so called 'Hindu religion' is not a revealed religion. It has evolved through the ratiocination of many sages as well as from amalgamation of many primitive cults of the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent and therefore, is not so well organized like the Semitic religions. Yet the Hindus too considered themselves sinful and always preyed the God to relieve them from their sins. They developed the ideas of soul, birth and death cycle, the Karmavipak theory and along with it a Varnashram System from which arose the obnoxious caste system. Organized religions, with their blind faith in supernatural authority supposedly revealed in this or that scripture which could be interpreted only by a privileged few came to dominate the whole social system. Dogmatism, then, took the form of religious persecution. (This has now taken the form of socio-political persecution.)

Reason had not receded even under the influence of dogmatic religion. In ancient India, Dharmakirti, a great philosopher and Principal of the Nalanda University characterized stupidity as 'the belief in the validity of the Vedas, belief that God created the world, that bathing is religious and that sins can be washed by fasts and penance.' God's existence cannot be proved logically but human beings want God to exist and accept any faulty logic to prove that. They deify their noble heroes like Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Mahavir, Christ, Mohammed, Guru Nanak or Basaveshwar and then consider their having existed on this earth as the proof of God's existence, for, their thoughts and deeds, their wisdom

and maturity, the loftiest height of human valor they reached make them look superhuman. Those in power and those who were culturally advanced found useful instruments of exploitation in these heroes as incarnations or sons or prophets of God. But even in those ancient days, in India, Charwak and Dignag refuted the concept of God. Buddha rejected idol worship and Chakradhar Swami rebutted many concepts of Vedas. They all knew that what the world needs is not a dogma but an attitude of scientific inquiry and man can prosper not by delusion but only by courage in the pursuit of truth. There is no such thing as purely contemplative knowledge or an apriori method of knowing the existence of something. Science is what you know and philosophy and religion are what you don't know.

According to Freud, 'the technique of religion consists of lowering the values of life and distorting the image of the real world in a fantastic way. It presupposes intimidation of intelligence. And by a forceful fixation of a psychic infantilism and its incorporation into a mass fantasy, religions succeed in saving many people from an individual neurosis'. This may be the reason why many people seek refuge in religiosity and having been relieved, one may say, from the individual neurosis they collectively turn into mass neurosis of religiosity.

It was thus the fear of the unknown as well as man's urge to know and attempt to understand and explain the natural phenomena and the unknown laws of nature that gave rise to the concept of God and the related systems of religion; while, on the other hand, it is the capacity to ask questions and to answer those questions that prompted the mental evolution of the human race culminating into science.

Ultimately reason triumphed over faith in a struggle that lasted for a whole millennium. The rational essence of human nature successfully weathered all vicissitudes to reassert itself ultimately as the revolt of man against the Almighty God and his more powerful agents on earth. Christian theologists, Thomas Aquinas and others developed the idea of the 'law governed universe' which inspired the pioneers Giordano Bruno, Cusa, Copernicus and Galileo to lay down the foundation of modern science. But the scientists had to fight a long battle with the established religions which had derived lot of material benefit on account of people's belief in God and propitiating him. Bruno was burnt at the stake; Galileo died in prison because they opposed what the Church said. Not only scientists but all those thinkers who dared oppose the established religions were persecuted. Martin Luther in Germany put up on the door of the church, 92 questions which the Church just could not answer. Much earlier Socrates had to drink a cup of poison in ancient Greece and Charwaks were persecuted in India for expressing opinions against the established religions. Many such incidents led to the movement of Agnosticism and Atheism that challenged the authority of people who derived personal or communal benefit by propagating God and religion.

Scientists have answered and are answering a large number of questions shrinking the unknown all the time. Science makes predictions endlessly and they turn out to be true. Religions have never been able to predict accurately. Mendeleyev predicted that Gallium would melt with the heat of your hand and when it was discovered 80 years later, its melting point was found to be 30 degrees centigrade. The existence of both Neptune and Pluto, the outermost planets of the Solar System, so far unknown was predicted when the actual trajectories and calculated trajectories of Uranus and later Neptune differed. Both these planets were discovered with more powerful telescopes in due course.

Religion, on the contrary is based on miracles that defy the laws of science. In fact gods and godmen are defined by the miracles they performed. Even the great Mother Theresa could attain sainthood only after her devotees concocted some miracles in her name after her death. The fact is that the miracles that are claimed to have been performed never actually happen. All the miracles of Saibaba of Puttaparthi can be duplicated by any good magician. Science grows continuously whereas religion remains stagnant because it depends on the texts written in ancient times. Bible was written some 2000 years ago; the Quran 1300 years ago and the Vedas may be some 5000 years ago. For the scientists what happens today and what may happen tomorrow are of greatest concern and not what is said in the ancient tomes. Scientists are concerned with poverty, hunger, lack of water and sanitation in all the poor countries. They are concerned with global warming, destruction of species, rising sea levels and of course nuclear weapons.

Religion and God are a source of a large number of conflicts today. We cannot ignore what has been happening in the Middle East, Israel and Palestine; as well as in Africa, Afghanistan and many other Asian countries. In our own country the greatest problem is how to safeguard our secular nature. Religion divides people while Science unites them. Most of the scientists who are non-believers do not go to any church, temple or mosque; but these are the people who gave us electricity, X rays, television, telephones, satellites and what not. Our politicians and leaders, on the other hand, instead of safeguarding secularity in public life, fan religiosity in the name of 'Sarvadharmasamabhav', which in reality means pandering all religions and godmen. Their obvious object is diverting people's attention from real life problems and wining votes to perpetuate their exploitative corrupt practices without hindrance.

It is said that knowledge has the tendency to leak. And science being knowledge too leaks. But the trouble here is that both knowledge and science do not seep and trickle down to the grass root level but stagnate at the level of intellectual aristocrats who are not particularly interested in spreading knowledge and science. Even these knowledgeable techno savvy intellectuals are reduced to robots being bombarded with information, by the blaring media, publicizing and promoting latest up-to-the-minute gadgets and products and other entertainment and reality shows that leave them with very little time to reflect. The downtrodden people can only watch their affluence and feel jealous. Both these classes feel helpless and turn to religion in the nightmarish scenario of affluence and poverty on the one hand and anxiety and insecurity on the other. People have not stopped worshipping or even creating new gods. Although man has got rid of the curse of small pox, people still worship the goddess of Small Pox- the Sheetal Mata. In Karnataka, a temple has been built to worship a new goddess called 'AIDS Amma' which has become a great tourist spot, depriving other nearby temples of their income. The ignorant poor as well as the knowledgeable rich indulge in such irrational customs.

The great atheist thinkers of earlier period did fight tenaciously against believers with logical, substantial and radical arguments and never lost to them on the level of ratiocination. But their thoughts could not impact the masses anywhere in the world. The masses have to struggle for their daily bread (which the prayers did not grant anyone so far) and are left with no time or opportunity to sharpen their capacity to reason. This is the difficult task that social reform movements like Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee (ANS) have to face. To educate the masses see reason and adopt scientific outlook, it is necessary to raise their socio-economic-political status that can be achieved only through a long, all inclusive reform movement of which ANS is an important component.

Initially ANS was agitating against Buvabaji (god men), ghosts, Bhanamati, Sorcery, etc. It was surely complementary to the broader, social reform movement initiated by Phule-Shahu-Ambedkar and many others who preceded and followed them. It was then looked upon as a minor action group of dedicated people. During the last 20 years, however, it has progressed through Eradication of Superstition, Scientific Way of Thinking, Scientific Outlook, Critique of Religion, Secularism and Rationalism. Progress on all these fronts continues simultaneously and has now become the main component of the broader, all inclusive reform movement carried out by secularists and rationalists. However there is slight difference between the thinking of ANS and other staunch rationalists. Like Rationalists, ANS too prefers that people maintain their moral rectitude solely depending on their own conscious; but it has no quarrel with those who want to be and are moral with the help of God and religion. For, being moral is important than being or not being religious. The organization does turn a blind eye to the social reality that most people are born in families that are religious and not rationalists. It is therefore necessary to intervene effectively but peacefully, amicably and democratically in the social life of people by encouraging and promoting their reasoning capacity. We all know that for ages religions have been teaching people to believe in supernatural power and to surrender to it. They have taught us to obey religious edicts and not to doubt their propriety; to leave everything to the religious luminaries and accept whatever destiny has decided for us. Eradicating this mentality and instilling confidence in oneself as the maker of one's destiny is a tall order and requires us to go slow with the reform movement. Bluntly telling people that God does not exist and depending on him for salvation is but foolishness will alienate the ANS from the society which is certainly not helpful to work at grass root level. ANS therefore adopts a policy of intervention by edifying people through various constructive programmes and activities.

ANS adopts a multi-pronged approach to the larger reform movement. Along with eradication of superstition, it aims at spreading knowledge especially of science; making people aware of all sorts of exploitation-economic, religious, social; making them aware of their responsibility towards environment and their duties as responsible citizens; making them conscious of the need to criticize religion and the malpractices carried out in the name of religion; instilling tolerance towards religions other than their own and engendering scientific outlook and rationalism in them. ANS is aware that to achieve all these aims it has to meet the young minds head-on and arranges many programmes for school children, college students and also their teachers, for the change of mind has to start when the minds are being formed. ANS has fought many a battle against the exploitative religious and social systems and the individual Buvas, Babas and Matas, some of whom have dragged the president of the organization into the court of law launching several cases against him in various courts all over the country. ANS does not just carry out a struggle against superstition and the godmen, it is a movement against the social system that engenders superstition and encourages godmen. Hunger, poverty, ignorance, religion, God and disease are the root cause of superstitions. ANS cannot fight many of these causes on its own; it therefore joins forces with many other like minded organizations and co-operates in their struggle against the system- the corruption in it, its neglect of the poor their health-education-nutrition, etc. as well as injustice, insensitivity and indifference of its administration towards public and such other things.

ANS needs to do many more things. There is a whole world of superstition in Maharashtra (and everywhere in the country) which needs to be studied; the activists need to be trained in handling the equipment as well as difficult situations that can arise; there is a need to raise a whole army of young activists trained in politics, economics, education and more importantly ethics; all of it being less theoretical and more practical.

Bertrand Russell had very succinctly put it; 'war, religion and nationalism are the three great evils in our life. We may add parochialism to this list. Fighting these three forces organizations like ANS have to guide the people from superstition to rationalism and finally to humanism; to the lofty ideal of 'Vishachi Maze Ghar' meaning that the whole world is my home- not in the sense of exploiting it (or like interest of America first and foremost) but in the sense of being responsible towards everything existing in it. Quoting Russell again; "A good life is one that is inspired by love and guided by knowledge and elicits the awareness that each generation is trustee to further generations of the mental and moral treasure that man has accumulated through the ages."

Lastly I may quote M.N. Roy from his booklet, 'The Rhythm of the Cosmos', "Liberated from the time-honoured spiritual bondage, thanks to the advance of modern science, man can rediscover the essence of his nature. It is not to believe but to question and enquire. The biological heritage of rationality enables man to penetrate deeper and deeper into the secrets of nature and discover the truth. It is also the only foundation of a *Voluntary Morality*. Reason is not a metaphysical category. It is the consciousness of the harmony of nature, and as such is empirical reality. Rationality is a biological function which is a microcosmic echo of the rhythm of the cosmos."

Suman Oak

Religious Blindness

The will to believe induces in religious people a variety of blindness for which there seems to be no cure. Apparently educated people, whom one would expect to be acquainted with at least the elements of logic, will, with the utmost seriousness make the most ridiculous statements which will send the non-believer into convulsions of laughter.

R D Karve
Reason Jan 1935

On the Allahabad High Court Verdict

There are three obvious problems with the Allahabad High Court judgment on the Babri Masjid issue. Each of them in isolation is potentially damaging for the Constitutional fabric of the country; together they can cause irreparable harm.

The first is the obliteration of the distinction between "fact" and "faith", which represents a serious retrogression to pre-modernity. In medieval times witches were burned because people believed that they engaged in evil deeds. A premise of modernity is that this and other such "beliefs" cannot be accepted as "facts", that there has to be independent and credible evidence on the basis of which alone a "fact" can be established. Hence the verdict of the Lucknow bench that Ram was born at the very spot which was the sanctum sanctorum of the Babri Masjid, because "people" believed this to be the case, is as mystifying as it is retrograde.

There are, to start with, the obvious, but weighty, questions of who these "people" are, how many such "people" must be there to qualify being called "the people", and what evidence the Lucknow bench had, even regarding the views of the "people", other than what it might have gathered as a result of the activities, claims and mobilizations of a few Hindu organizations which professed to speak in the name of the "people". To take the word of organizations that claim to speak in the name of the "people" as the voice of the "people" is dangerous enough. But to take the "beliefs" of the "people", even assuming these are indeed the well-established "beliefs" of a very large number of people, as synonymous with "facts" strikes at the very root of rationality that must underlie a modern society.

A large number of "people", far more than those believing that Ram's actual birthplace was below the central dome of the Babri Masjid, used to believe till recently (and many perhaps do even now) that being touched by a Dalit or sharing food with a Dalit brings great misfortune; but to take this belief as a fact and to justify the practice of untouchability on the basis of it defies reason. For a Court of Law, no less, to wipe off the distinction between "belief" and "fact" therefore sets a dangerous precedent. The BJP had been demanding precisely this, namely that whether Ram was actually born there or not as a matter of "fact" is irrelevant; since "people" believe that he was born there, that alone is adequate ground for building a temple there on the ruins of a mosque. The Court has implicitly accepted the BJP's patently irrational and communal-fascist argument.

The fact that the Court has taken such a position is hardly surprising, given the fact that one of the judges gives expression to his own "faith" by claiming that "He (i.e. Lord Ram) is everywhere" and treats it as a "fact". What Justice Sharma may hold as his private belief is his own business. His choosing to parade his own religious belief in a judgment that should be based on "facts" shows the dangerous extent to which even the senior judiciary in our country has become unmindful of Constitutional demands.

The second disturbing aspect of the judgment is the obliteration of the distinction between "negotiation" and adjudication. The outcome of negotiations always depends upon the relative strengths of the protagonists. Hence in any situation of conflict, especially of the "either-or" sort, where the relatively stronger protagonist is absolutely intransigent over its claim, negotiations necessarily work to the detriment of the relatively weaker protagonist. In the present context, where the Hindu organizations were intransigent, any process of settlement through negotiations would necessarily have worked against the organizations belonging to the minority community. Since the latter considered this unfair, it went to the court of law. The basic reason of its going to the Court therefore, or even for the matter being referred to the Court, is that the outcome arrived at on the basis of relative strengths is not universally accepted as "fair". The Court is supposed to be fair because it does not settle issues on the basis of relative strengths but entirely on the basis of evidence, facts and legal provisions. The picture of justice, depicted as a maiden, typically has her eyes covered for this very reason, namely that justice is blind to the relative strengths, positions, powers, and pulls of the protagonists. The rationale of adjudication lies in the fact that its outcome is decided on principles entirely different from those underlying negotiations.

This is why the judiciary is different from societal (as opposed to State) institutions like khap panchayats. The latter are pre-modern, and hence anti-democratic, for two distinct reasons: first, the attitudes of such panchayats are pre-modern, based, as mentioned earlier, on "faith", "beliefs", "customs" and practices rather than "facts"; second, the decisions of these societal organizations necessarily and directly reflect the relative strengths of the protagonists and the power relations existing among them. The "beliefs" and power relations no doubt are themselves correlated, but they are not identical. The judiciary, by contrast, being a part of the State, and hence based on a Constitution that guarantees equality before law for everyone, is supposed to function with its eyes closed, uninfluenced by the relative strengths of the protagonists.

True, in a class society, this is never the case; but that is because a class society constitutes in essence a betrayal of a democratic Constitution. The fact of relative strengths and power relations affecting the process of adjudication, even within the framework of a democratic Constitution that guarantees juridical equality, is a *de facto* rather than a *de jure* outcome of a class society. But when the outcome of adjudication itself becomes *de jure* dependent upon the relative strengths of the protagonists, then that represents a dangerous trend, a retrogression from modernity and democracy. And this is exactly what the judgment has done: it has based itself not on "facts" and law but on considerations of what might be acceptable. Since what might be acceptable depends upon the relative strengths of the protagonists, adjudication in this case has ceased to remain adjudication; it has got influenced by the relative strengths of the protagonists.

It is not surprising that after the verdict the BJP is talking about rapprochement, about peaceful settlement, about negotiated solutions. This is because its "reservation outcome", i.e. the "worst case scenario" possible from its point of view, as expressed by the Allahabad High Court verdict, is already favourable enough for it; it can only improve upon its position, by buying up the one-third share that the High Court has given to the Waqf Board, and hence getting exclusive rights over the entire disputed land.

The third problem with the judgment is that it has accepted the demolition of the Babri Masjid, an act that was a direct violation of the law of the land, as a *fait accompli*; and by remaining silent on this *fait accompli* while giving a verdict that echoes in essence what those who undertook the demolition were claiming, it has implicitly rationalized post facto that horrendous and unlawful act of demolition. L.K. Advani has quickly seized upon the opportunity to claim that his "Rath Yatra" has been validated post facto. And since the slogan "Mandir Wahin Banayenge" [We Will Build the Temple Again] has now been given a legal clearance, even while the demolition of the mosque that prepared the ground for the implementation of this slogan has gone un-condemned, the BJP and other Hindu outfits feel vindicated and absolved of any blame for their misdeeds.

True, this Court was not supposed to pronounce any verdict on the demolition; it was concerned with a property dispute. But, the obvious question arises: would it have given the land under the central dome of the Babri Masjid to "the Hindus" if the mosque was still standing? If it had done so, then it would have had to implicitly condone an act of demolition since the Hindu outfits then would have been legally entitled to do what they wish, with the land over which they had been given legal rights. And if it had not done so, then it means that the demolition has affected their verdict, i.e. that the legal outcome of a property dispute has been affected by an act of illegal demolition: the Hindu outfits have benefited from their illegal action of demolishing a five hundred-year old mosque.

The fact that the High Court verdict has been taken in a calm manner by the people of the country is a matter of great gratification. It is symptomatic of the maturity of the people and also of the fact that communal issues are being pushed into the background as more basic issues of material life are becoming the focus of the people's attention. This is a very welcome development, and in this context many have welcomed the Allahabad High Court judgment as putting an end to the long-standing controversy, so that the country can move on. Many therefore feel that keeping the issue alive by going to the Supreme Court should be avoided; and because of this they are also unhappy with criticisms of the High Court judgment.

While this is an understandable position, it is erroneous for two reasons. First, any retreat to pre-modernity of the sort that the verdict has displayed is fraught with serious consequences that go beyond the specific issue under consideration, i.e. the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue. If "fact" and "faith" are not distinguished, if adjudication is influenced by the relative bargaining strengths of the protagonists, and if a patently unlawful act brings legal dividends to those who perpetrated it, then it augurs ill for democracy in the country.

Secondly, issues like this leave behind wounds that fester and can cause damage later even if there is no immediate cause for concern. Justice needs to be done, in a manner that is in conformity with the blindness of the maiden. That is the only firm basis on which a modern State can be built; and the resolution of even specific issues like this lies ultimately in the building of such a modern State. Hopefully, the Supreme Court to which the matter will be referred will be mindful of the pitfalls of quick-fixes and will uphold scrupulously the cause of law.

Dr. Prabhat Patnaik
Courtesy: *Peoples Democracy*

Rationalists on Trial

All rationalists must guard against lapses into non-rational behaviour in their daily lives. They cannot, in the very nature of things, be members of this or that religious association wears caste-mark or holy threads, observe fasts, go to temple festivals and so on. The writer is aware of the fact that in many cases, external influences are so powerful, that it is impossible for all but the most exceptional to stick to their convictions and bring them into practice. But if there is any compulsion one must try one's best to resist it, or if resistance is impossible, submit only under protest. We must always remember that we are on trial. We are being observed with greater minuteness than other people.

R D Karve
Reason, Feb 1932

Scope of Rationalism

A cursory survey of the History of Rationalism shows that it has been, from the beginning of the movement, directed against Theism based on Revelation, or divine instinct in man. There has been no satisfactory account given in any Scriptures of the West or the East, as to the reliability of the medium through which God has revealed Himself and His religious doctrines to Mankind in any age. The writers of the religious texts said to have been revealed, exercised and laid down several absurd theories and tenets, which, for several centuries were taken as true in the respective localities, by the ignorant and illiterate people, and innumerable superstitious habits and customs thus came into vogue.

Gradually as some people advanced in education and in powers of reasoning, doubts began to be entertained as to the truth and utility of the teachings recorded in Scriptures and their subsequent interpolations teeming with contradictions and absurdities. The faith in the people, in general, grew very strong because of the observance of the rituals enjoined on them, for hundreds of generations, with the result that they were all rooted to the very fibre of their mental constitution; and they could not tolerate any opposition. Rational thinkers have found it very dangerous to interfere with the trend of beliefs and thoughts, prevailing among people.

RD Karve,
Reason, Sept 1934

Babri Masjid Issue

"The tendency to turn human judgment into Devine command makes religion one of the most dangerous forces in the world."

After demolition of an old dilapidated building called " Babri Masjid" in DEC '92, a few leaders, belonging to Saffron - Outfit danced in glee, as though they have performed a most heroic deed in the history of this country, just like the primitive tribes dance around the Fire after a good Game-Hunt. There after hundreds of columnists in both English and other languages wrote hundreds of articles bringing to our notice many historical facts, which we laymen had not known earlier.

In Barkha Dutt's 'We The People' Programme on 26th Sept. 2010 many legal luminaries gave their opinions, but only one Panel member pointed out, that Hindus too demolished Jain & Buddhist - structures to convert them into Hindu temples. In coastal district of Karnataka the local Brahmins forcibly took over Jain temples and converted them into Hindu temples. Many Historians and Archeologists have recorded that the Buddhist Enclave 'Nagarjunakonda' was vandalized extensively by hordes of people on Shakaracharya's instigation.

The verdict on 30th Sept 10 confounded many legal luminaries. One prominent leader from Saffron-front declared authoritatively that the learned Judge gave his verdict based on what he perceived and tradition. On this, another expert remarked that the verdict was like the Village-Panchayat' judgement. It is surprising how such learned people haven't read what the world-teacher Jiddu Krishna Murthy had repeatedly said that 'Tradition clouds perception. Tradition betrays the present and those who follow tradition are trapped in the past'. Another word widely used by Hindus is "Parampara" meaning tradition. Most irrational acts are committed under Parampara - even killing ones sister or daughter for violating Parampara by men even from elite society. This word has become an evil bug planted in the minds of Hindus through indoctrination over centuries. Thus the verdict appears to be based on Parampara and not on legal grounds of a modern secular democracy.

As a genesis to this whole episode, I am reproducing below a few excerpts relevant to the context from an Article " The Lost Civilizations " (Published in Indian Express 2-3 decades back) by S.B.Roy, Director of the Institute of Chronology, New- Delhi, in which he re-constructs the Proto-History of the world, 4000 years ago, when dynasties like *Devas*, *Rakshas*, *Vanaras* and many others lived and fought in Aryana.

Two generations of scholars had toiled for hundred years to prepare the first definitive History of the world--Itihasa--Purana. It was compiled under the supervision Vyasa and delivered by Ugrashrava Sauti at the time of Naimisharanya conference of the Intellectuals. (circa.1316 B.C)

Vyasa the encyclopaedist who lived at the time of Mahabharata battle (1400 B.C.) collected material for a world history and entrusted the work to Roma Harshana. The scholars who helped in this gigantic task were , Atreya Sumati, Kashyapa, Akripabrana, Bharadwaja, Agnivircas, Vashista mitrayu, Savarni Somataki, Susirman Samsapayana and Ugrashrava Sauti son of Romaharshana.

Some of Those dynasties were misrepresented as devils, beasts or aboriginals by Europeans and some Indian Ideologists. For example great injustice has been done to the *rakshasas* by the Indian poets who showed only their evil traits. The Rigveda apparently took no notice of them because neither Rama nor Ravana appear in any hymn. As mentioned earlier, Dasaratha was a junior contemporary of Divodasa and fought Timidhwahaja, an ally of Shambara, the Harappan. The synchronism is confirmed by Pargitar and Pradhana. Both pointed out that Divodasa's sister Ahalya was married to Sarantvanta Gautama, a priest of Siradhwaja Janaka(Siradhwaja's daughter Sita was

married to Rama, son of Dasaratha) Where did Ravana live and rule? It is certain he was a great and powerful king who was a terror to the Aryan kings. It is also possible that Ravana was a title, like Janaka, because one of the Ranas was said to be a cotemporary and friend of Kartivirya Arjuna who lived thirty generations earlier than Dasarathi-Rama. Be that as it may, Ravana was a powerful king and the field-worker who will search for his bones (and gold) amidst the Neolithic graves of the Gond Tribal- chiefs will be disappointed.

It is possible to associate Sita and Janaka with the agricultural revolution in the Northern India in 2000 B.C. Sita was deified as the goddess of the earth. Sita was deified as the furrow or the goddess of agriculture. We do not know where Rama lived and ruled. Rama was already deified in Mitanni by 1400 B.C as is shown by a letter from Tusrata (cf. Dasaratha) to Amenhotep found in Tellai--Amarna achieves. The locale of the Rama-Ravana battle is yet to be found. There must be a great city of 2000 B.C like Mohanjo Daro still to be excavated.

In all other civilizations mythologies were consigned to the dust-bin of history. In Indic civilization, mythologies were constructed from the Proto-History. These mythologies were made up to masquerade as history and a few characters were made up to masquerade as gods and divinities, having been attributed with magical and supernatural traits. Rama is one of them. The whole of Ramayana the epic is based on a bad verdict. It is a fact that the priests and rulers were liberally consuming the heady-wine called 'Soma' King Dasaratha that night might have drunk lot of wine and went to the queen Kaikayee. He was not sober and in a half--sleepy state when the queen got his promise for making her son Bharat the next king. When the time arrived for fulfilling the promise Dashrath consulted in anguish his *Raj-Purohith* (Royal Priest). This crafty priest, instead of going by "Dharma" and tradition sided with the queen. Thus Rama had to go to forest and the epic was born. Had the priest taken the path of 'Dharma' the present Lalla--Gulla and spilling of blood would not have occurred. As this is only a fiction no one raised the question of logic. It is an irony that the modern judiciary went by tradition and perception and the ancient "Raj-Purohith" went by legality of a king's promise but not by "Dharma" and tradition of crowning the Eldest prince.

Here is a major question to saffron ideologues. By 7th or 8th century all were aware that there was the Holy- Bible in practice in southern India, and Holy Koran was knocking at the doors of North-West India. In such a political situation a conclave of Vaidic- high-priests and rulers found it necessary to compile a Holy-Book for Hindus. Two Books were compiled: One was "Yoga-Vashist", an imaginary dialogue between Rama and Sage Vashist; and the other "Gita" an imaginary dialogue between Arjun and Krishna. But the Vaidic priests rejected 'Yoga-Vashist' as that was a large document with profound thoughts and metaphysical world-views, giving them no scope for interpolations. But 'Gita' was short with a few hundred verses (made up to 700 verses by interpolations). In Gita they could scrumptiously put words into Krishna's mouth, out of context, to comply with their agenda of Caste-Based society, a legion of Gods and senseless rituals. At that period they rejected Rama and now they use his name to create hatred and bloodshed.

Can the media be courageous to address the youth with the facts from history to raise their level of consciousness. A section of youth and the large middle-class are sucked into a 'Black--Hole' created by saffron ideology, obscurantism originated in rituals, priests, highly -commercialized temples, astrologers, fake god-men, intellectually barren TV soaps and consumerism. Youth is the future. Therefore media should be futuristic. They should canalize the youth -- energy to "Ever-widening thoughts and actions and not allow their 'clear stream of reason to loose its way into the dreary desert-sands of dead-- habits'" (R.Tagore)

The essence of Hindutva is defined by "Upanishadic verses 'thou are that spirit', 'Aham Brhamasmi'. Upanishads propounded that every living being is part of this 'Brahma' an ever moving, ever transforming ,progressive force (S.Radhakrishnan) - A formless God. Jiddu Krishna Murthy had beautifully said this -- "You are rest of humanity, 'You are the observer and you are the observed" " We are all part of the same consciousness'.

Keshava Shet Revankar

Unity of all Religions

Dr. Bhagwandas, father of Shri Prakash, sometime Governor of then Bombay State, wrote a voluminous book by name "Essential Unity of all Religions", published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. It is said that Dr. Bhagwandas took 30 years to produce this book. It was immediately after partition when the injuries of Hindu-Muslim riots were still fresh. If it was the intention of the author to bring about the two communities, it has miserably failed, though it got him "Bharat Ratna". Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is essentially a Hindu revivalist body, though occasionally it publishes non-revivalist books.

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan of Delhi has rightly pointed out that basic principles of all religions are different and are mutually exclusive; it is incorrect to say that there is unity of all religions. Maulana was commenting on a judgment of the Supreme Court which upheld the election of Manohar Joshi. He was pointing out that "Hinduism was a way of life" was an erroneous statement. In an earlier case, the Court pointed out several parameters which, according to it, would dub a person as a Hindu, though not all Hindus believed in Vedas and Upanishads. In fact, there were atheists who were embraced by the term 'Hindu'.

If you go through the book by Dr. Bhagwandas, you will notice that he does not refer to the original scripture of religions. He consulted some Muslim scholars to understand what is there in Islam. Dr. Bhagwandas himself has not studied the original books of other religions, let alone Muslim. He has taken some stanzas, as given to him, from other religions and finding that they sound similar concludes that there is unity in all religion. Take for example words like "God", "Truth" which will be found in all religions, though in Jainism and Buddhism God has no place.

In order to find out the unity of all religions, one must go back to their basic tenets. If Quran says that truth has been dictated by Allah, though differently, that will not show unity. Let us see the things that are essentially followed by different religions.

- The Prophet; ▪ A book; ▪ A holy place; ▪ Pilgrimage.

Let us begin with the Prophet.

According to Concise Oxford Dictionary, prophet means a teacher or interpreter at God's will. It is through him you know what is expected by God from him. God does not speak to the people. It is the Prophet that tells you what is expected from you.

Among Jews, you can take Moses as a prophet because he brought from Sinai the Ten Commandments. Moses did not write any treatise, his sayings constitute the teachings of Jews. "Sabbath" is one of the commandments. Fasting a day in a week, because after creating the world in six days, God took rest on the seventh. Fasting is observed in different ways in different religions, but that is not Sabbath. Is this commonality? Is this unity among the religions? No other prophet teaches fasting, that Quran – through Mohammed – does. Buddha and Jesus do teach fasting.

Then there is the Book among the Jesus, Talmud, which includes Old Testament, regarded as a sacred book. It prophesies a Messiah who will free the Hebrews. That was long before Jesus Christ was born to expiate the sins of mankind – at least the first sin when Adam ate the forbidden fruit. This is the belief of Christians. Jews, of course, did not agree nor do they agree that Jesus was a Messiah. For claiming to be a God and for other blasphemies, he was crucified. Christianity was not born immediately. The Prophets of Hebrew and of Christianity are totally different. The former does not admit the divinity of Jesus. There is no similarity or unity between Judaism and Christianity.

Buddha can be called a Prophet. But what he taught was entirely his own. No God's will. Jainism has no prophet. Mahavir, a contemporary of Buddha and the last of Tirthankaras, taught what is now called Jainism.

Now we come to Mohammed, the prophet of Islam. He did not interpret the will of the God. He tells the will of the God conveyed to him through angel Gabriel. The number of things Mohammed speaks of in the Quran are too many that cannot be easily summarized in this article. Circumcision, borrowed from Jews, what to eat, what not to eat, when to marry and whom not to marry – they are all ordained in the Quran which is binding on all Muslims. For the sake of record, the following are the essentials for a Musalman:

- There is only one God and Mohammed is his messenger; ▪ Five times Namaz;
- Thirty days fasting during day time (Ramzan); ▪ Haj; ▪ Zakat.

A Persian couplet says that one can talk of ill of God; but not Mohammed. Worship anyone, but Allah, is a taboo. But Mohammed is sacred, though like all of us, he is a man and mortal. Quran says that he is a Prophet and he is the seal of Prophet – he is the last of prophets. There is no prophet after him. Guru Nanak or Basaveshwar, though they are founders of religions, are not prophets. Quran says Islam is for entire mankind and not merely for Arabs. Islam was born in the 7th Century, but it is only second population-wise in the world – 14 thousand years it was born.

What is the similarity among these three Semitic religions? Hinduism has no prophets. They are non-human ("*apouresheya*"). Upanishads are mostly commentaries and interpretations of Upanishad. Idol worship is galore among the Hindus. There is not one book for Hindus. For some there is no book at all. In Hinduism there is no hatred of other religions. In Hinduism there can be sub-religions – like Veerashaivism. Though confined to Karnataka, does this religion have similarity with any other? Essential unity?

Then there is a question of Holy Place. For Jews it was the Temple which also is no more. For Christians it is Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. Mecca is the Holy Place for Muslims – Mohammed was born there. Quran says that every Musalman must perform Haj (i.e. pilgrimage to Mecca) at least once in his lifetime (provided it is possible). Hindus regard pilgrimage to Kashi (Varanasi) as a sacred duty, though no book confirms it. Buddha did not recommend any Holy Place but Buddhists regard Bodha Gaya a sacred place. Jains have no Holy Place. So some religions have no Holy Place. Can one regard this as unity of religions?

The Prophet, the Book and the Holy Place are different for different religions. Though there is similarity among them, there is no unity. One shocking thing must be told. Though there are sects among religions, there are no castes. To our lasting shame, we had Harijans and Mahars who were untouchables. In no other religion you could find untouchability, though now it is not there in India also. How did Dr. Bhagwandas find essential unity among all religions when untouchability was there among Hindus?

There are certain other things which must be touched. Fasting – Muslims must fast for thirty days (Ramzan) during days. Jews fast on Sabbath days though there is no religions. So also Christians who fast on some days. For Jains and Buddhists, there is no fasting. For Hindus things are peculiar. On the eleventh day of each half of each month, fasting is recommended. On Mahashivaratri day, Shaivas fast, Vaishnavas feast. Births and deaths are observed in different ways in different parts of the country. It is only among Jews and Musalmans that circumcision is religiously compulsory.

Read in detail, the religions throw up different and, sometimes, mutually inconsistent principles and practices. There is no unity among different religions. In the Constitution of India, Article 14 says that all citizens of India are equal. But that is political equality and not religious.

Justice R.A. Jahagirdar (Retd)

Alternate Medicine Leads to Darkness

Exaggerated claims, misleading advertisements, and false information about complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) make it virtually impossible to protect the public from today's snake oils readily available, inter alia, by Internet, TV, radio, and pharmacy shelves. Prince Charles of UK is a staunch defender of Homeopathy and millions of people swear by it. The books shaking his belief on such medicines will never find their way to Prince Charles's bedside table.

In the book, *Trick or Treatment?* subtitled 'The undeniable Facts About Alternative Medicine' the truth about the efficacy of alternative medicine is rigorously addressed by the scientists uniquely qualified to do so. Written by a best selling science author and a journalist, Simon Singh, who boasts a PhD in particle physics, and Edzard Ernst, a professor in complementary therapy, clearly hope to set a standard in the genre. Having spent over a decade at Exeter University meticulously analyzing the bewildering evidence for and against alternative therapies, Edzard Ernst, this former practitioner of both traditional and complementary medicine brings no bias to the subject.

In fact they introduce their book by quoting Hippocrates as providing their guiding path:

There are, in fact, two things, science and opinion; the former begets knowledge, the latter ignorance.

Any treatment which cannot stand up to the rigours of scientific enquiry, by which Singh and Ernst mean a well conducted controlled clinical trial, has no place calling itself medicine and is simply hocus-pocus with good PR. At best such therapy is simply no better than placebo; at worse it is positively dangerous. But even if it is harmless, it is far from costless, as the annual global spend on alternative medicine is in the region of £40 billion, money that could be spent on more fruitfully, should alternative therapies prove to be ineffective.

To explain this, Singh and Ernst take a historical approach, building the notion of the clinical trial as the gold standard for evaluating medical interventions. They start by telling us of one of the casualties of the ancient regime; on December 13, 1799 former President George Washington awoke with the symptoms of a cold. He thought nothing of it, but by the following night he was gasping for air; serious, but potentially survivable, until bloodletters drained Washington of half his blood in less than a day. These men weren't witchdoctors, but Washington's personal physicians. They thought that they were working in the great man's best interests, but alas the medical profession had yet to work out how to distinguish interventions that worked from those that didn't.

Typically, it was a British man who first came up with the randomized control trial, even more typically he then totally failed to capitalize upon his insight. The man was a naval surgeon called James Lind. Britain at this time was the world's greatest seafaring nation, but any journey lasting more than a few weeks was blighted by scurvy, a disease we now know is caused by a deficit in vitamin C. Lind split twelve scurvy sufferers into six pairs, and gave each a different treatment. He also observed another group of sailors who received no treatment; these acted as a control. As a shot in the dark, to one pair he gave oranges and lemons; this group made a miraculous recovery.

Just as interesting, Singh and Ernst tell us about Florence Nightingale and her penchant for statistics. Feeling a divine calling to become a nurse, Nightingale decided to work in the hospitals of the Crimean war, having read reports of the large numbers of soldiers dying there from cholera and malaria. Upon her arrival at her chosen hospital she embarked on the mother of all spring cleans and within one week removed 215 handcarts of filth, had flushed the sewers nineteen times and buried the carcasses of two horses, a cow and four dogs all of which were found in the hospital grounds. But amazing to us now the officers and doctors who were previously in charge, felt that these changes were an insult to their professionalism. Fortunately Nightingale also had a statistical education and used this to demonstrate that soldiers under her new order fared much better than those hospitalized in less salubrious conditions. By telling this Ernst and Singh also seek to demonstrate that, quite opposite to what alternative

practitioners believe, scientists *are* willing to accept ideas which run contrary to the current received wisdom. The clinical trial is such a strong instrument that it forces them to do so.

In the next four chapters of their book, the authors take four of the main branches of alternative medicine to task: Acupuncture, Homeopathy, Chiropractic therapy and Herbal Medicine. They take us through the history of each approach, its theory of action and assess the evidence for its efficacy. In fact Chiropractic therapy is not practiced much in India. However, it will soon take over the other therapies and allopath.

Acupuncture, is an ancient treatment, whereby the body's 'Ch'i', its vital energy or life force flows through our bodies in channels called meridians. Illnesses are due to imbalances or blockages in the flow of Ch'i and the goal of acupuncture is to tap into the meridians at key points to rebalance or unblock the Ch'i. Ernst and Singh cite the experience of James Reston, who was reporting on Nixon's 1973 Chinese visit as key for acupuncture's introduction into the west. Whilst in China he suffered from appendicitis and was treated by acupuncture, bringing news of his treatment and recovery home. Unlike Reston, Ernst and Singh are unconvinced. They demolish positive papers published by the WHO as having included too many trials, some of which used poor methodology, and conclude that the science behind acupuncture is implausible and totally without evidence. They finish by saying that Acupuncture has inconsistent evidence to suggest that it has a use in pain and nausea control.

If acupuncture gets one point, then Homeopathy gets null. This was the work of a German physician Samuel Hahnemann at the end of the 18th century. Hahnemann correctly realised that he and his medical colleagues knew nothing about how to treat people, but he then moved away from the then conventional medicine and contrived to establish his own brand of treatment. Having taken quinine one morning he found himself having the same symptoms as if he had malaria. From this he extrapolated a universal principle

'That which can produce a set of symptoms in a healthy individual can treat a sick individual who is manifesting a similar set of symptoms.'

Even better, he went on to say that the potency of a cure could be greatly enhanced by diluting them. Not just a little bit either; some homeopathic remedies are at the sort of concentration you might expect from putting a teabag in Lake Superior. Singh and Ernst find this all highly improbable, and put any positive effects attributed to this brand of alternative medicine down, amongst other things, to the body's ability to heal itself.

{In fact Ernst and Singh challenge homeopaths to demonstrate that homeopathy is effective by showing that the Cochrane Collaboration has published a review that is strongly and conclusively positive about high dilution homeopathic remedies for any human condition. They cite

"The conclusion in our book (Trick or Treatment) suggests that there is no convincing evidence to show that homeopathic remedies are effective in the treatment of any conditions, except as a placebo. However, our conclusion has been met by criticism from many homeopaths, who claim that homeopathy is effective and who accuse us of ignoring or misunderstanding the evidence. So who is right, us or the homeopaths? We are so confident in our conclusion that there is no convincing evidence to support the use of homeopathy that on 16 June 2008 we announced a £10,000 reward for anybody who could prove us wrong."

The founders of chiropractic therapy argue that ill health in the body is due to subluxations, slight misalignments of vertebrae in the spine. These subluxations interfere with the flow of innate intelligence (a bit like Ch'i). They are corrected by spinal manipulation, whereby the practitioner flexes or extends the neck beyond its normal range of movement. There are some chiropractors called 'mixers', who are basically back specialists, however their 'straight' colleagues believe that their techniques can cure the body of ills seemingly unconnected with the bony structures. It is reported in the book that it is not unusual for chiropractors to spinally manipulate patients without their consent on their first appointment, and furthermore that this spinal manipulation has led to vertebral artery dissections and death in patients.

(When Simon Singh wrote an article on bogus claims of chiropractic therapy for the *Guardian*, The British Chiropractic Association, preferred reality to bend to their will. They've been making some outrageous claims lately about the efficacy of their "treatment", things that are clearly wrong. Simon wrote about this in a column, saying, *The British Chiropractic Association claims that their members can help treat children with colic, sleeping and feeding problems, frequent ear infections, asthma and prolonged crying, even though there is not a jot of evidence. This organisation is the respectable face of the chiropractic profession and yet it happily promotes bogus treatments.*

Unsurprisingly, the BCA took a dim view of this. Instead of producing the results of variable-controlled double blind studies with statistically significant testing procedures to back up their claim, they sued him instead. In the US that would be a dumb thing to do, as US libel laws put the burden of proof on the claimant (in this case, the BCA), as things should be. However, the UK is very different: when party A sues party B for libel, it's up to party B to prove their innocence.

The ramifications of this are obvious: a chilling effect on dissent in the media against, well, anything. If you call someone on the carpet for making fallacious claims, they can basically shut you up by suing you. Not surprisingly, there are many people dissatisfied with this approach to libel, but it's what Simon is dealing with currently.

Worse, in Simon's case, a judge ruling in the preliminary hearing agreed with the BCA, citing Simon's use of the word "bogus" to mean that the BCA knowingly is perpetrating fraud. The judge is obviously wrong here; Simon went to some pains to indicate in that very article that his use of *bogus* did not mean intentional fraud, but instead to mean *wrong*, as in chiropractic techniques cannot be used to cure the ills the BCA claims.)

Before their finger pointing and conclusions and an interesting section entitled 'Why do smart people believe such odd things?' Singh and Ernst take as their fourth case study Herbal Medicine. This is a more tricky area for them, as unlike their previous three methodologies, some herbal remedies, for example St John's Wort, actually work. Here the problems are more subtle. There's worse too, as herbal remedies can interact with conventional drugs with unpredictable consequences and if they are taken in preference to conventional medicines they won't get you very far, as the authors tell us was discovered by several unfortunate, but trusting, cancer victims. And beware; some herbal remedies are effective because they actually contain conventional medicines.

So whose fault is this? Ernst and Singh propose that most alternative remedies trade on being more natural, traditional and holistic, three ideas they quickly dispatch. Uranium is natural, bloodletting was traditional, and holistic medicine is not a preserve of alternative practitioners – GPs regularly give lifestyle advice. According to authors, there should be warning messages on alternative medical treatments like cigarettes they say, accurately reflecting the current evidence. For Homeopathy this would read

Warning:

This product is a placebo. It will work only if you believe in homeopathy and only for certain conditions, such as pain and depression. Even then it is not likely to be as powerful as orthodox drugs. You may get fewer side effects, from this treatment, than from a drug, but you will probably get less benefit.

A "rapid guide to alternative therapies" attached as appendix to this book summarizes the background, the evidence, and scientific conclusion for 36 additional popular therapies, including aromatherapy, Ayurvedic tradition, colonic irrigation, food supplements, hypnotherapy, magnet therapy, massage therapy, spiritual healing, and traditional Chinese medicine. In fact it is interesting to know that how these therapies were involved, who got benefits out of them. A therapy called Alexander Therapy is nothing but a process of relearning correct postural balance and coordination of body movements. How any one can believe that sitting position will cure recurring loss of voice? Authors describe many fake gadgets which were developed to fool the public. These entrepreneurs generally claim that their gadgets cure this disease or prevent that disease and make money. While commenting on Indian Ayurveda tradition authors

comment that the whole system of Ayurveda has not been submitted to clinical trials, but elements of it have. Except for a few remedies none of them have the evidence sufficiently strong to warrant a positive recommendation.

In this way, in their hard-hitting scrutiny of alternative and complementary cures, authors also strive to reassert the primacy of the scientific method as means for determining public health and policy. In fact authors point out at ten culprits in the promotion of unproven and disproven medicine. The list includes celebrities, sham medical researchers, Universities, the media, hungry of sensationalizing news, medical professionals who are not honest to their profession and plethora of alternative medicine societies and lastly WHO. They go onto blame celebrities for endorsing alternative treatments, universities for providing alternative medicine courses to make money and thus legitimizing alternative approaches, the media for inaccurately reporting the benefits of alternative therapies and many doctors for prescribing alternative medicine to get difficult patients out of their consulting rooms.

Prabhakar Nanawaty

TRICK OR TREATMENT: The Undeniable Facts about Alternative Medicine

Authors: Simon Singh and Edzard Ernst, MD

Published by W. W. Norton & Company, New York, pp 342

Richard Dawkins and Astrology

First, the forecasts, or character-readings, are so bland, vague and general that they fit almost anybody and any circumstance. People normally read only their own horoscope in the newspaper. If they forced themselves to read the other 11 they'd be far less impressed with the accuracy of their own. Second, people remember the hits and overlook the misses. If there is one sentence in a paragraph-long horoscope which seems to strike home, you notice that particular sentence while your eye skims unseeingly over all the other sentences.

Even if people do notice a strikingly wrong forecast, it is quite likely to be chalked up as an interesting exception or anomaly rather than as an indication that the whole thing might be baloney.... The common tendency among educated people is to indulge astrology as a bit of harmless entertainment. I doubt if it is harmless, and I wonder whether people who describe it as entertaining have ever actually been entertained by it.

Astrology is an aesthetic affront. Its pre-Copernican babblings demean and cheapen astronomy, like using Beethoven for commercial jingles. It is also an insult to the science of psychology and the richness of human personality. I am talking about the facile and potentially damaging way in which astrologers divide humans into 12 categories. Scorpios are cheerful, outgoing types, while Leos, with their methodical personalities, go well with Libras (or whatever it is).

What do you believe in?

As a skeptic and atheist I am often asked, "What do you believe in?" The ending preposition implies something more than what factual claims are to be believed, such as evolution, quantum physics, or the big bang. What is suggested by the question is what values does one believe in or hold to, especially without belief in God and religion. Here is my answer.

- I believe in the Principle of Freedom: *All people are free to think, believe, and act as they choose, so long as they do not infringe on the equal freedom of others.*
- I believe in civil liberties, civil rights, and the freedoms guaranteed in the United States Constitution, including and especially freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to assemble peacefully, freedom to petition grievances, freedom to worship (or not), freedom of the press, freedom of reproductive choice, freedom to bear arms, etc.
- I believe in the sanctity of private property, the rule of law, and equal treatment under the law.
- I believe in free will, free choice, moral culpability, and personal responsibility.
- I believe in truth seeking and truth telling.
- I believe in trust and trustworthiness.
- I believe in fairness and reciprocity.
- I believe in love, marriage, and fidelity.
- I believe in family, friendship, and community.
- I believe in honor, loyalty, and commitment to family, friends, and community members.
- I believe in forgiveness when it is genuinely asked for or offered.
- I believe in kindness, generosity, and charity, especially voluntary aid to others in need.
- I believe in science as the best method ever devised for understanding how the world works.
- I believe in reason and logic and rationality as cognitive tools for answering questions, solving problems, and devising solutions to life's many problems and quandaries.
- I believe in technological growth, cultural advancement, and moral progress.
- I believe in the almost illimitable capacity of human creativity and inventiveness for our species to flourish into the far future on this planet and others.

So, if you are ever asked by a believer what you believe in, offer your own list along these lines of values that you honor, and then ask, "Why, what do *you* believe in? Do you not honor these values?"

The impetus for essay, which I penned on a plane to Los Angeles on October 15, 2010, was that I was asked this very question the night before during the Q&A after a talk I delivered before a sizable audience at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, sponsored by CASH (Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists), supported by several other Minnesota atheist and humanist groups, and attended as well by many believers. The woman who made the inquiry explained that as an atheist she is often asked this question in a tone implying that atheists cannot or do not believe in anything.

Nothing could be further from the truth, of course, but such is the delimiting effect of religious belief and the myth that without God anything goes. Quite the contrary. Without God, values matter more here and now than they ever could in any projected afterlife proscenium where the moral play is finally enacted.

P.S. The final line above translates as: *To the stars with difficulty*. The phrase originated with the Roman poet Seneca the Younger and was made famous on a plaque honoring the Apollo 1 astronauts who perished in a fire on the launch pad at Cape Canaveral.

Michael Shermer

Rationalism

Rationalism is the belief that the world we live in can be understood by the use of Reason. The rationalist argues for a rational approach to human problems, proposes reasoned alternatives to religious dogmas, aims to advance a secular system of education and wishes to defend freedom of thought and civil liberties.

Reason is a tool for solving problems, creating strategies, debunking nonsense and undermining dogmas. However, feeling, compassion and imagination are also important in driving and enriching our actions and thoughts. The strength of reason is that it is a powerful tool of understanding and a means of arriving at rational decisions. Human choices are not always made with complete rationality, but it is preferable to aim for the reasonable than to choose without thought.

The scientific process is powered by the use of reason. Much progress has come through scientific understanding, although the application of science, such as atomic explosions or genetic modification, can sometimes be dangerous. Imagination and empathy enable us to envisage the outcome of the application of science. The arts too can enlarge our concept of being human.

Rationalists have questioned the claims of religious thinkers and religious institutions. They may be agnostics or atheists, but they doubt the claims of the supernatural on the grounds of lack of reasonable evidence. The attitudes and injunctions of religions seem unconvincing when examined in the light of reason.

Rationalists envisage that the use of reason will lead to human progress - even if not in a steady upward course. Rationalists reckon that the sum of human progress may be increased by the careful and consistent use of reason.

The Bogus Message: *The Secret*, a self-help DVD

As the saying goes, opposites attract, as when an electron races to a positively charged ion, or the north pole of a magnet pulls the south pole of another. But try telling that to proponents of *The Secret*, the latest in a long line of spiritual systems aimed at selling personal prosperity through faulty scientific reasoning.

In case you've missed it on Oprah or Larry King Live, *The Secret* is a self-help DVD and companion book synthesizing the pitches of a few dozen of today's most prominent self-help gurus. Its creator, an Australian named Rhonda Byrne, claims there's a single truth underlying all these systems. It's more ancient than the Bible and has been intentionally hidden from human beings for just as long. The great secret? Positive thinking. Abundance is a state of mind: Think healthy and you'll be healthy. Or more to the point think rich, and you'll get rich. Most of the spiritual teachers in *The Secret* are wealth-seminar leaders who display the book's logo on their Web sites. *The Secret* has certainly worked wonders for its marketers: More than 1.5 million DVDs have been sold, and the book hit number one on The New York Times best-seller list of hardcover advice books.

While positive thinking no doubt has its benefits - from the placebo effect to good old self-confidence- *The Secret* tries to justify itself not only in the language of pop psychology but in that of modern physics. According to the book, happy thoughts will do more than affect behavior. It claims the interrelatedness of matter and energy (a principle proven by Einstein) allows people to change reality to their liking by changing the way they think about it. (Thought is presumably energy in this schema, and reality is matter.) For most, however, this potential for cosmic transmutation is limited to attracting more money into their personal bank accounts.

To be sure, it's entertaining to marvel at *Masaru Emoto*, a Japanese alternative healer who claims that crystals grow more symmetrically inside bottles labeled with positive messages than in those with negative messages attached. But such "results" can be explained by the observer's tendency to notice the crystals he is looking for rather than the ones that don't fit his expectations. That's why people basing psychiatric therapies on pseudoscientific research will get mixed results at best. Stick a Post-it note with a positive message on a schizophrenic's forehead and see how far you get changing the water molecules in his brain into happy ones.

Meanwhile, a growing arsenal of healing machines based loosely on tenuous non-locality theories from the fringes of quantum physics have become an increasingly popular alternative to the discomfort of scientifically verifiable chemotherapy. With names like SCIO and Rife, these machines don't even need to be in the same room or city as the patient they're treating - since, as their proponents reason, quantum mechanics doesn't recognize physical distance. Sure, if this "energetic medicine" makes a person feel better or more optimistic - and doesn't delay or replace therapies that might actually work - there's no harm except to the wallet.

So why bother condemning all this wishful thinking? After all, who of us hasn't ever experienced a bit of *The Secret's* real power? Wearing an expensive suit to an interview or flying first class, as one of *The Secret's* featured instructors suggests on his Web site, can make you feel and act differently. Sometimes spending more money does seem to bring more money in, and speaking positively often leads to better results than whining about how tough life is.

But such techniques are hardly new, let alone secret. Like mastering the will through self-hypnosis or better negotiating through body language, the "*power of positive thinking*" has nearly a century-old track record among car dealers, admen, and others for whom attitude means as much as, if not more than, attributes. It's from this universe of phantom values and socially constructed truths that *The Secret* derives its ultimate power. Try sharing *The Secret* with some refugees from Darfur; you'll probably find the results are not terribly impressive.

No, *The Secret* is best applied in the same foggy arenas from which it emerged. It's great for self-help gurus, spiritual evangelists, salespeople, and multilevel marketers because it's based in the same kinds of mythology on which they've always relied: There's a timeless principle, a preexisting law of nature only now becoming understood by science but completely easy for you to use to make your life better.

Just pay me, and I'll share it with you.

Douglas Rushkoff
Courtesy: *Discover June 3007*

Top Ten Myths of Popular Psychology

Virtually every day, the news media, television shows, films, and Internet bombard us with claims regarding a host of psychological topics: psychics, out of body experiences, recovered memories, and lie detection, to name a few. Even a casual stroll through our neighborhood bookstore reveals dozens of self-help, relationship, recovery, and addiction books that serve up generous portions of advice for steering our paths along life's rocky road. Yet many popular psychology sources are rife with misconceptions. Indeed, in today's fast-paced world of information overload, *misinformation* about psychology is at least as widespread as accurate information. Self-help gurus, television talk show hosts, and self-proclaimed mental health experts routinely dispense psychological advice that is a bewildering mix of truths, half-truths, and outright falsehoods. Without a dependable tour guide for sorting out psychological myth from reality, we're at risk for becoming lost in a jungle of "psycho-mythology."

In our new book, *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology: Shattering Widespread Misconceptions About Human Nature*, we examine in depth 50 widespread myths in popular psychology (along with approximately 250 other myths and "mini-myths"), present research evidence demonstrating that these beliefs are fictional, explore their ramifications in popular culture and everyday life, and trace their psychological and sociological origins. Here, we present (in no particular order) our own candidates for the top 10 myths of popular psychology.

Myth #1: We Only Use 10% of our Brains

Whenever those of us who study the brain venture outside the Ivory Tower to give public lectures, one of the questions we're most likely to encounter is, "Is it true that we only use 10% of our brains?" The look of disappointment that usually follows when we respond, "Sorry, I'm afraid not," suggests that the 10% myth is one of those hopeful truisms that refuses to die because it would be so nice if it were true. In one study, when asked "About what percentage of their potential brain power do you think most people use?," a third of psychology majors answered 10%. Remarkably, one survey revealed that even 6% of neuroscientists agreed with this claim! The pop psychology industry has played a big role in keeping this myth alive. For example, in his book, *How to be Twice as Smart*, Scott Witt wrote that "If you're like most people, you're using only ten percent of your brainpower."

There are several reasons to doubt that 90% of our brains lie silent. At a mere 2–3% of our body weight, our brain consumes over 20% of the oxygen we breathe. It's implausible that evolution would have permitted the squandering of resources on a scale necessary to build and maintain such a massively underutilized organ. Moreover, losing far less than 90% of the brain to accident or disease almost always has catastrophic consequences. Likewise, electrical stimulation of sites in the brain during neurosurgery has failed to uncover any "silent areas."

How did the 10% myth get started? One clue leads back about a century to psychologist William James, who once wrote that he doubted that average persons achieve more than about 10% of their *intellectual potential*. Although James talked in terms of underdeveloped potential, a slew of positive thinking gurus transformed "10% of our capacity" into "10% of our brain." In addition, in calling a huge percentage of the human brain "silent cortex," early investigators may have fostered the mistaken impression that what scientists now call "association cortex" — which is vitally important for language and abstract thinking — had no function. In a similar vein, early researchers' admissions that they didn't know what 90% of the brain did probably fueled the myth that it does nothing. Finally, although one frequently hears claims that Albert Einstein once explained his own brilliance by reference to 10% myth, there's no evidence that he ever uttered such a statement.

Myth #2: It's Better to Express Anger Than to Hold it in

If you're like most people, you believe that releasing anger is healthier than bottling it up. In one survey, 66% of undergraduates agreed that expressing pent-up anger — sometimes called "catharsis" — is an effective means of reducing one's risk for aggression. A host of films stoke the idea that we can tame our anger by "letting off steam" or

"getting things off our chest." In the 2003 film *Anger Management*, after the meek hero (Adam Sandler) is falsely accused of "air rage" on a flight, a judge orders him to attend an anger management group run by Dr. Buddy Rydell (Jack Nicholson). At Rydell's suggestion, Sandler's character plays dodgeball with schoolchildren and throws golf clubs. Dr. Rydell's advice echoes the counsel of many self-help authors. John Lee suggested that rather than "holding in poisonous anger," it's better to "Punch a pillow or a punching bag." Some psycho-therapies encourage clients to scream or throw balls against walls when they become angry. Proponents of "primal scream therapy" believe that psychologically troubled adults must release the emotional pain produced by infant trauma by discharging it, often by yelling at the top of their lungs.

Yet more than 40 years of research reveals that expressing anger directly toward another person or indirectly toward an object actually turns up the heat on aggression. In an early study, people who pounded nails after someone insulted them were more critical of that person. Moreover, playing aggressive sports like football results in increases in aggression, and playing violent videogames like *Manhunt*, in which participants rate bloody assassinations on a 5-point scale, is associated with heightened aggression. Research suggests that expressing anger is helpful only when it's accompanied by constructive problem-solving designed to address the source of the anger.

Why is this myth so popular? In all likelihood, people often mistakenly attribute the fact that they feel better after they express anger to catharsis, rather than to the fact that anger usually subsides on its own after awhile.

Myth #3: Low Self-Esteem is a Major Cause of Psychological Problems

Many popular psychologists have long maintained that low self-esteem is a prime culprit in generating unhealthy behaviors, including violence, depression, anxiety, and alcoholism. From Norman Vincent Peale's 1952 *The Power of Positive Thinking* onward, self-help books proclaiming the virtues of self-esteem have become regular fixtures in bookstores. In his best-seller, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Nathaniel Branden insisted that one "cannot think of a single psychological problem — from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or of success, to spouse battery or child molestation — that is not traceable to the problem of low self-esteem."

The self-esteem movement has found its way into mainstream educational practices. Some athletic leagues award trophies to all schoolchildren to avoid making losing competitors feel inferior. One elementary school in California prohibited children from playing tag because the "children weren't feeling good about it." Moreover, the Internet is chock full of educational products intended to boost children's self-esteem. One book, *Self-Esteem Games*, contains 300 activities to help children feel good about themselves, such as repeating positive affirmations emphasizing their uniqueness.

But there's a fly in the ointment: Research shows that low self esteem isn't strongly associated with poor mental health. In a comprehensive review, Roy Baumeister and his colleagues canvassed over 15,000 studies linking self-esteem to just about every conceivable psychological variable. They found that self-esteem is minimally related to interpersonal success, and not consistently related to alcohol or drug abuse. Moreover, they discovered that although self-esteem is positively associated with school performance, better school performance appears to contribute to high self-esteem rather than the other way around. Perhaps most surprising of all, they found that "low self-esteem is neither necessary nor sufficient for depression."

Myth #4: Human Memory Works like a Video Camera

Despite the sometimes all-too-obvious failings of everyday memory, surveys show that many people believe that their memories operate very much like videotape recorders. About 36% of us believe that our brains preserve perfect records of everything we've experienced. In one survey of undergraduates, 27% agreed that memory operates like a tape recorder. Even most psychotherapists agree that memories are fixed more or less permanently in the mind.

It's true that we often recall extremely emotional events, sometimes called *flashbulb memories* because they seem to have a photographic quality. Nevertheless, research shows that even these memories wither over time and are prone

to distortions. Consider an example from Ulric Neisser and Nicole Harsch's study of memories regarding the disintegration of the space shuttle *Challenger*: A student at Emory University provided the first description 24 hours after the disaster, and the second account two and a half years later.

Description 1. "I was in my religion class and some people walked in and started talking about [it]. I didn't know any details except that it had exploded and the schoolteacher's students had all been watching which I thought was so sad. Then after class I went to my room and watched the TV program talking about it and I got all the details from that."

Description 2. "When I first heard about the explosion I was sitting in my freshman dorm room with my roommate and we were watching TV. It came on a news flash and we were both totally shocked. I was really upset and I went upstairs to talk to a friend of mine and then I called my parents."

Clearly, there are striking discrepancies between the two memories. Neisser and Harsch found that about one-third of students' reports contained large differences across the two time points. Similarly, Heike Schmolck and colleagues compared participants' ability to recall the 1995 acquittal of former football star O. J. Simpson 3 days after the verdict, and after many months. After 32 months, 40% of the memory reports contained "major distortions."

Today, there's broad consensus among psychologists that memory isn't *reproductive* — it doesn't duplicate precisely what we've experienced — but *reconstructive*. What we recall is often a blurry mixture of accurate and inaccurate recollections, along with what jells with our beliefs and hunches. Indeed, researchers have created memories of events that never happened. In the "shopping mall study," Elizabeth Loftus created a false memory in Chris, a 14-year-old boy. Loftus instructed Chris's older brother to present Chris with a false story of being lost in a shopping mall at age 5, and she instructed Chris to write down everything he remembered. Initially, Chris reported very little about the false event, but over a two week period, he constructed a detailed memory of it. A flood of similar studies followed, showing that in 18-37% of participants, researchers can implant false memories of such events as serious animal attacks, knocking over a punchbowl at a wedding, getting one's fingers caught in a mousetrap as a child, witnessing a demonic possession, and riding in a hot air balloon with one's family.

Myth #5: Hypnosis is a Unique "Trance" State differing in Kind from Wakefulness

Popular movies and books portray the hypnotic trance state as so powerful that otherwise normal people will commit an assassination (*The Manchurian Candidate*); commit suicide (*The Garden Murders*); perceive only a person's internal beauty (*Shallow Ha!*); and (our favorite) fall victim to brainwashing by alien preachers who use messages embedded in sermons (*Invasion of the Space Preachers*). Survey data show that public opinion resonates with these media portrayals: 77% of college students endorsed the statement that "hypnosis is an altered state of consciousness, quite different from normal waking consciousness," and 44% agreed that "A deeply hypnotized person is robot-like and goes along automatically with whatever the hypnotist suggests."

But research shows that hypnotized people can resist and even oppose hypnotic suggestions, and won't do things that are out of character, like harming people they dislike. In addition, hypnosis bears no more than a superficial resemblance to sleep: Brain wave studies reveal that hypnotized people are wide awake. What's more, individuals can be just as responsive to suggestions administered while they're exercising on a stationary bicycle as they are following suggestions for sleep and relaxation. In the laboratory, we can reproduce all of the phenomena that laypersons associate with hypnosis (such as hallucinations and insensitivity to pain) using suggestions alone, with no mention of hypnosis. Evidence of a distinct trance unique to hypnosis would require physiological markers of subjects' responses to suggestions to enter a trance. Yet no consistent evidence of this sort has emerged. Hypnosis appears to be only one procedure among many for increasing people's responses to suggestions.

Myth #6: The Polygraph Test is an Accurate Means of Detecting Lies

Have you ever told a lie? If you answered "no," you're lying. College students admit to lying in about one in every three social interactions and people in the community about one in every five interactions. Not surprisingly, investigators

have long sought out foolproof means of detecting falsehoods. In the 1920s, psychologist William Moulton Marston invented the first polygraph or so-called “lie detector” test, which measured systolic blood pressure to detect deception. He later created one of the first female cartoon superheroes, *Wonder Woman*, who could compel villains to tell the truth by ensnaring them in a magic lasso. For Marston, the polygraph was the equivalent of Wonder Woman’s lasso: an infallible detector of the truth.

A polygraph machine plots physiological activity - such as skin conductance, blood pressure, and respiration - on a continuously running chart. Contrary to the impression conveyed in such movies as *Meet the Parents*, the machine isn’t a quick fix for telling whether someone is lying, although the public’s desire for such a fix almost surely contributes to the polygraph’s popularity. In one survey of introductory psychology students, 45% believed that the polygraph “can accurately identify attempts to deceive.” Yet interpreting a polygraph chart is notoriously difficult.

For starters, there are large differences among people in their levels of physiological activity. An honest examinee who tends to sweat a lot might mistakenly appear deceptive, whereas a deceptive examinee who tends to sweat very little might mistakenly appear truthful. Moreover, as David Lykken noted, there’s no evidence for a *Pinocchio response*, such as an emotional or physiological reaction uniquely indicative of deception. If a polygraph chart shows more physiological activity when the examinee responds to questions about a crime than to irrelevant questions, at most this difference tells us that the examinee was more nervous at those moments. Yet this difference could be due to actual guilt, indignation or shock at being unjustly accused, or the realization that one’s responses to questions about the crime could lead to being fired, fined, or imprisoned. Thus, polygraph tests suffer from a high rate of “false positives” - innocent people whom the test deems guilty. As a consequence, the “lie detector” test is misnamed: It’s really an arousal detector. Conversely, some individuals who are guilty may not experience anxiety when telling lies. For example, psychopaths are notoriously immune to fear and may be able to “beat” the test in high pressure situations, although the research evidence for this possibility is mixed.

Were he still alive, William Moulton Marston might be disappointed to learn that researchers have yet to develop the psychological equivalent of Wonder Woman’s magic lasso. For at least the foreseeable future, the promise of a perfect lie detector remains the stuff of comic book fantasy.

Myth #7: Opposites Attract

The notion that “opposites attract” is a standard part of our cultural landscape. Films, novels, and TV sitcoms overflow with stories of diametrical opposites falling passionately in love. The 2007 smash hit comedy, *Knocked Up*, is perhaps Hollywood’s latest installment in it’s seemingly never-ending parade of wildly mismatched romantic pairings. Most of us are convinced that people who are opposite from each other in their personalities, beliefs, and looks tend to be attracted to each other. Lynn McCutcheon found that 77% of undergraduates agreed that opposites attract in relationships. This belief is also widespread in pockets of the Internet dating community. On one site called “Soulmatch,” Harville Hendrix, Ph.D. (described as a “relationships expert”) states that “It’s been my experience that *only* opposites attract because that’s the nature of reality. The great myth in our culture is that compatibility is the grounds for a relationship — actually, compatibility is grounds for boredom.”

On the contrary, research suggests that Hendrix has gotten his myths precisely backward. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, opposites *don’t* attract. Dozens of studies demonstrate that people with similar personality traits are more likely to be attracted to and hang out with each other than people with dissimilar personality traits. For example, people with a Type A personality style, who are hard-driving, competitive, and time-conscious, prefer dating partners who have a Type A personality. Similarity in personality traits predicts not only initial attraction, but marital stability and happiness. Similarity on the personality trait of conscientiousness seems to be especially important for marital satisfaction. So if you’re a hopelessly messy person, you’re best off finding someone who isn’t a total neat freak. The “like attracts like” conclusion also extends to our attitudes and values. The more similar someone’s attitudes (for example, political views) are to ours, the more we tend to like that person.

Myth #8: People with Schizophrenia Have Multiple Personalities

A prevalent misconception is that schizophrenia is the same thing as “split personality” or “multiple personality disorder.” A popular bumper sticker, for example, reads: “I was schizophrenic once, but we’re better now.” The schizophrenia-multiple personality misconception is widespread. In one survey, 77% of introductory psychology students agreed that “a schizophrenic is someone with a split personality.” The 2000 comedy film, *Me, Myself, and Irene*, starring Jim Carrey, features a man supposedly suffering from schizophrenia. Yet he actually suffers from a split personality, with one personality who’s mellow and another who’s aggressive.

In fact, Schizophrenia differs sharply from the diagnosis of *dissociative identity disorder* (DID), once called multiple personality disorder. Unlike people with schizophrenia, people with DID supposedly harbor two or more distinct “alters” - personalities or personality states - within them at the same time. Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1886 novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, is probably the best known illustration of multiple personality in popular literature. Nevertheless, many psychologists find the assertion that DID patients possess distinct and fully formed personalities to be doubtful. It’s far more likely that these patients are displaying different, but exaggerated, aspects of a single personality.

The schizophrenia-DID myth probably stems in part from confusion in terminology. Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler coined the term “schizophrenia,” meaning “split mind,” in the early 20th century, and many writers soon misinterpreted Bleuler’s definition. By schizophrenia, Bleuler meant that people suffer from a “splitting” within and between their psychological functions, especially emotion and thinking. For most of us, what we feel and think at one moment corresponds to what we feel and think at the next. Yet in the severe psychotic disorder of schizophrenia, these linkages are ruptured. As Bleuler observed, people with schizophrenia don’t harbor more than one co-existing personality; they possess a single personality that’s been shattered.

Regrettably, many people in the general public don’t appreciate the fact that schizophrenia is often a profoundly disabling condition associated with a heightened risk for suicide, clinical depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, unemployment, and homelessness. As Irving Gottesman noted, “everyday misuse of the terms schizophrenia or schizophrenic to refer to the foreign policy of the United States, the stock market, or any other disconfirmation of one’s expectations does an injustice to the enormity of the public health problems and profound suffering associated with this most puzzling disorder of the human mind.”

Myth #9: Full Moons Cause Crimes and Craziness

Once every 29 days on average, an event of rather trivial astronomical significance occurs. But according to some writers, it’s an event of enormous psychological significance. What is it? A full moon. Over the decades, authors have linked the full moon to a host of phenomena: strange behaviors, psychiatric hospital admissions, suicides, traffic accidents, crimes, heavy drinking, dog bites, births, crisis calls to emergency rooms, violence by hockey players...the list goes on and on. The word “lunatic” derives from the Latin term *luna*, or moon. Legends of werewolves and vampires, terrifying creatures that supposedly often emerged during full moons, date back at least to the ancient Greeks, and were popular in Europe during much of the Middle Ages. In 19th-century England, some lawyers used a “not guilty by reason of the full moon” defense to acquit clients of crimes committed during full moons.

Even today, the notion that the full moon is tied to strange occurrences - the “Lunar Effect” or “Transylvania Effect” - is deeply embedded in popular culture. One study revealed that up to 81% of mental health professionals believe in the lunar effect, and a study of nurses demonstrated that 69% believe that full moons are associated with increase in patient admissions. In 2007, Brighton, England instituted a policy to place more police officers on the beat during full moon nights.

Psychiatrist Arnold Lieber popularized the idea of a correlation between the full moon and behavior. For Lieber, the lunar effect stems mostly from the fact that the human body is four-fifths water. Because the moon affects the tides of the earth, it's plausible that the moon would also affect the brain, which is, after all, part of the body. Yet as astronomer George Abell noted, a mosquito sitting on your arm would exert a more powerful gravitational force on your body than would the moon. Furthermore, the moon's tides are influenced not by its phase — that is, by how much of it's visible on earth — but by its distance from earth. Indeed, during a "new moon," the phase at which the moon is invisible to us on earth, it exerts just as much gravitational influence as it does during a full moon.

In 1985, two psychologists reviewed all available research evidence on the lunar effect, and found no evidence that the full moon is related to much of anything — crimes, suicides, psychiatric problems, psychiatric hospital admissions, or calls to crisis centers. Later investigators examined whether the full moon is linked to suicides, psychiatric hospital admissions, dog bites, or emergency room visits, and came up empty-handed.

What psychologists term the "fallacy of positive" instances may help to explain the persisting popularity of belief in the lunar effect. When an event confirms our hunches, we tend to take special note of it and recall it. In contrast, when an event disconfirms our hunches, we tend to ignore or reinterpret it. So, when there's a full moon and something out of the ordinary, say, a surge of admissions to our local psychiatric hospital, happens, we're likely to remember it and tell others about it. In contrast, when there's a full moon and nothing unusual happens, we typically overlook or discount it. In one study, psychiatric hospital nurses who believed in the lunar effect wrote more notes about patients' strange behavior during a full moon than did nurses who didn't believe in the lunar effect. The nurses attended more to events that confirmed their hunches, which in turn probably bolstered these hunches.

Myth #10: A Large Proportion of Criminals Successfully Use the Insanity Defense

After giving a speech on the morning of March 30th, 1981, President Ronald Reagan emerged from the Washington Hilton hotel. Seconds later, six shots rang out. One hit a secret service agent, one hit a police officer, another hit the President's press secretary James Brady, and another hit the President himself. The would-be assassin was a delusional 26 year-old man named John Hinckley, who had fallen in love from a distance with actress Jodie Foster and become convinced that by killing the President he could make Foster reciprocate his feelings for her. In 1982, following a trial featuring dueling psychiatric experts, the jury found Hinckley not guilty by reason of insanity. The jury's decision triggered an enormous public outcry; an ABC News poll revealed that 76% of Americans objected to the verdict.

Surveys show that most Americans believe that criminals often use the insanity defense as a loophole to escape punishment. One study revealed that the average layperson believes that the insanity defense is used in 37% of felony cases, and that this defense is successful 44% of the time. This survey also demonstrated that the average layperson believes that 26% of insanity acquittees are set free, and that these acquittees spend only about 22 months in a mental hospital following their trials.⁶⁸ Many politicians share these perceptions. One study revealed that politicians in Wyoming believed that 21% of accused felons had used the insanity defense, and that they were successful 40% of the time. In 1973, President Richard Nixon made the abolition of the insanity defense the centerpiece of his effort to fight crime.

Yet these perceptions of the insanity defense are wildly inaccurate. Data indicate that this defense is raised in less than 1% of criminal trials and that it's successful only about 25% of the time. For example, in the state of Wyoming between 1970 and 1972, a grand total of 1 (!) accused felon successfully pled insanity. Members of the general public also overestimate how many insanity acquittees are set free; the true proportion is only about 15%. Moreover, the average insanity acquittee spends between 32 and 33 months in a psychiatric hospital, considerably longer than the public estimates. In fact, criminals acquitted on the basis of an insanity verdict typically spend at least as long in an institution (such as a psychiatric hospital) as criminals who are convicted.

How did these misperceptions of the insanity defense arise? We Americans live increasingly in a "courtroom culture." Between *Court TV*, *CSI*, *Law and Order*, and *CNN's Nancy Grace*, we're continually inundated with information about the legal system. Nevertheless, this information can be deceptive, because the media devotes considerably more coverage to legal cases in which the insanity defense is successful, like Hinckley's, than to those in which it isn't. As is so often

the case, the best antidote to public misperception is accurate knowledge. Lynn and Lauren McCutcheon found that a brief fact-based report on the insanity defense, compared with a news program on crime featuring this defense, produced a significant decrease in undergraduates' misconceptions concerning this defense. These findings give us cause for hope, as they suggest that it may take only a small bit of information to overcome misinformation.

We can all be fooled by psycho-mythology, largely because so many popular misconceptions dovetail with our intuitive hunches. As a consequence, we must turn to scientific reasoning, which is a set of safeguards against the tendency to confirm our initial beliefs, to evaluate whether the claims of the pop psychology industry pass muster. The good news is that by continually scrutinizing and questioning popular psychology claims with scientific thinking and scientific evidence, we can come to a better understanding of our mental worlds and make better everyday life decisions.

Dr. Scott O. Lilienfeld , et al

Curse of Timidity

When we speak of social evils, we are in the habit of considering only physical and physiological ones, and more especially, alcoholism, syphilis, and tuberculosis. Evidently these are not by any means small evils and it is certainly to fight them courageously, and this is no easy task either, considering their prodigious development in present society, whose machinery becomes more complicated everyday.

In my opinion, however, there are also social evils of a moral nature, which though their manifestations are less violent, are at least as harmful as those I have mentioned above. I think one of the most important of these is the mental disease called timidity, which is pregnant with evil consequences for individuals as well as for groups. What evil does it not beget, with its deep and varied manifestations!

RD Karve
Reason, July 1934

Saints and Fakirs

India is infested with saints, Sadhus, Sanyasis, Fakirs and other religious charlatans too numerous to mention. One meets them at every corner. The mentality of the uneducated Indian masses forms a particularly favourable environment for them to flourish in. They are privileged beggars and cannot be treated with contempt. For most of them lay claim to supernatural power and if they condescend to beg, it is only to provide the faithful with the opportunity to practice the noble virtue of Charity.

R D Karve
Reason Mar 1932

Time to Accept Atheism

If you are one of those committed atheists in the Richard Dawkins mould who dreams of ridding the world of religious mumbo-jumbo, prepare yourself for a disappointment: there is no good evidence that education leads to secularisation.

In fact, the more we learn about the "god instinct" and the refusal of religion to fade away under the onslaught of progress, the more the non-religious mindset looks like the odd man out. That is why anthropologists, psychologists and social scientists are now putting irreligion under the microscope in the same way they once did with religious belief.

The aim is not to discredit atheism but to understand how so many people can override a way of thinking that seems to come so naturally. For that reason, atheists should welcome the new scrutiny.

Atheism still has a great deal to commend it, not least that it doesn't need supernatural beings to make sense of the world. Let's hope the study of atheism leads to new insights into how to challenge such irrationality.

Here is a fact to flatter the unbelievers among you: the bright young things at the University of Oxford are among the most godless groups ever studied in the UK. Of 728 students surveyed in 2007, 48.9 per cent claimed not to believe in any god, with 49.6 per cent claiming no religious affiliation. And while a very small number of Britons typically label themselves as "atheist" or "agnostic" (most surveys put it at about 5 per cent), an astonishing 57.3 per cent of the Oxford sample did.

This may come as no surprise. After all, atheism is the natural stance of the educated and the informed, is it not? It is only to be expected that Oxford students should be wise to what their own professor Richard Dawkins calls "self-indulgent, thought-denying skyhookery" - and others call "faith". The old Enlightenment caricature, it seems, is true after all: where Reason reigns, God retires.

Of course, things are never quite that simple. Within the sample, for instance, the postgraduates (that is, the even-better educated) were notably more religious than the undergraduates, in terms of both belief in God and self-description. Although the greater number of non-Europeans in the postgraduate population is almost certainly a significant factor here, evidence from elsewhere backs the idea that there is no straightforward relationship between atheism and education.

Let's look at some results from the World Values Survey, an international attempt to assess the global state of socio-cultural, moral, religious and political values. The 2005 results show that while there is a clear positive correlation between education and lack of belief in God, the effect is slightly weaker, not stronger, among those with a university education (14.8 per cent were non-believers) compared with those whose highest attainment was secondary level (17.2 per cent).

What is more, the survey shows a far stronger correlation between education and certain "irrational" beliefs: for example, only 29.6 per cent of those without even an elementary education believe in telepathy, compared with 51.8 per cent of people with degree-level education.

Closer to home, an analysis of the 2008 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey by David Voas of the University of Manchester reveals that the historical correlation between being educated and being "non-religious" has not only weakened but reversed. Looking at white British people, for example, the findings show that only around 25 per cent of men aged between 25 and 34 claiming "no religion" have degrees, compared with around 40 per cent of those describing themselves as religious. For women in the same age group, the difference is less marked but the trend is

the same. The picture is more complicated across different ethnic groups, although the overall trend remains the same.

It appears that Enlightenment assumptions about the decline of religion as the population becomes more educated will no longer do - at least, not without considerable qualification. Why is it that, despite the long history of the study of religion, the picture seems to be getting more and not less confused about what it means to believe in God? We and the scholars who gathered in December last year for a conference at Wolfson College, University of Oxford, think we may have the answer. The problems stem from a long-term, collective blind spot in research: atheism itself.

This oversight might seem remarkable (or remarkably obtuse on the part of the social scientists) but it is one with deep historical roots. Many of social science's 19th-century founders, including Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Auguste Comte and Max Weber, were unbelievers, or "religiously unmusical", as Weber memorably put it. For them, religion was the great explicandum: how, they wondered, could so many people believe in something so absurd? What they failed to recognise was that their own, taken-for-granted, "lack" of belief might itself be amenable to inquiry.

Ironically, sociologists, psychologists, economists and, particularly, cognitive anthropologists have become so skilled at explaining why humans seem to have such a widespread bias towards theistic beliefs that a new question readily presents itself: if religion comes so naturally to us, why are so many people, especially in western Europe, apparently resistant to it? In the UK, for example, a sizeable 43 per cent said they had "no religion" in the 2008 BSA survey.

If religion comes naturally to us, why are so many people resistant to it?

Moreover, social scientists themselves consistently rank as the most atheistic of all academics: see a recent study by Neil Gross at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, and Solon Simmons of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia (*Sociology of Religion*, *in press*).

What we need now is a scientific study not of the theistic, but the atheistic mind. We need to discover why some people do not "get" the supernatural agency many cognitive scientists argue comes automatically to our brains. Is this capacity non-existent in the non-religious, or is it rerouted, undermined or overwritten - and under what conditions?

Psychologically, we need to know how the self functions without theistic belief, and how our emotional resources might be altered by its absence. Anthropologically, we need to understand how people without religion make sense of their lives, how they find meaning, and how non-theistic systems of thought are embedded in, and shape, the different cultures in which they are present. Sociologically, we need to know how these alternative meaning-making systems are shared between societies, how they unite or divide us, and whether non-religious groups contain pro-social elements commonly associated with religion itself.

For all these reasons and more - not to mention the sheer thrill of entering uncharted waters - we set up the international and interdisciplinary Non-religion and Secularity Research Network in late 2008. The Wolfson meeting was the NSRN's inaugural conference, only the second event on this topic ever to be held in Europe. (The first was convened by the Vatican in 1969.)

The conference presented the first fruits of research in this area - and discussed how much still needs to be done. One of the first tasks is to develop a common academic vocabulary. In this article, for instance, we have danced between "atheistic", "non-theistic", "non-religious", "unbelieving" and "godless" as if they were synonyms. They're not.

Interesting findings have, however, begun to emerge; some providing insight into the relationship between education and atheism. Voas, also a keynote speaker at the Wolfson conference, says one reason why a greater number of religious people are degree-holders may be that "better educated people have typically reflected on religion and have the self-confidence to come down decisively, on one side or the other". The issue is not which idea - atheism or theism

- is more stupid than the other, but that education helps us either to work out or simply to communicate our beliefs, no matter what they are.

He also notes the observation by another keynote presenter, Colin Campbell of the University of York, whose 1971 book *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* had until very recently been a lone voice in the wilderness. Campbell argues that though the educated are often the first to articulate a new cultural perspective, if that perspective becomes popular, it will spread across the population. As a result, the education levels associated with that perspective naturally average out. So it is that the relationship between intelligence or education and cultural shifts may not be as significant as they first appear.

Everybody stands to benefit from wider and more systematic research of the atheistic or non-religious. The believers may take heart from the fact that the most comprehensive studies no longer suggest the unreligious are cleverer or more lettered than them. But the non-believers might also comfort themselves that they are no longer outside the mainstream. They have become a "normal" and significant part of many societies. And researchers ignore them at their peril

Religious Hallucinations

Where there is a strong will to believe argument is of no avail, but to anybody who really wants to find out the truth, a study of hallucinations is indispensable. It will explain how grossly absurd statements came to be commonly believed by people who are to all appearances reasonable in other matters, but who will not listen to argument where religion is concerned. I know a religious gentleman, who is now dead, who resolutely refused to read rationalistic literature because he was afraid that it might possibly make him change his views. But people can of course decide for themselves whether they prefer religion or knowledge.

- R D Karve
Reason Mar 1932

Brahminism

Brahminism is nothing but a crafty profession under the guise of religion and has knack of appearing under false pretences. It is gross and sexual, and yet appears to be refined and spiritual. It is vicious and crooked and yet pretends to be moral; worldly and yet seems to be religious. Such a system should be destroyed ruthlessly for the very spirit of Brahminism is inimical to the good of humanity. It represents a feudal form of capitalism and exploits the wealth of the rich under the form of Daksina which is the life force of Brahminism.

R D Karve
Reason, Oct 1932

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THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build



Rationalist Society

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Sabarimala Makar Jyothi: Man Made 'Divinity'

One has heard that faith can move the mountains, but this year a mountain could not stand the weight of faith. Tragically on 14th Jan, 2011, a hillock where thousands of devotees had congregated to have a glimpse of Makar Jyothi, due to the melee of the devotees, the hillock crumbled resulting in the stampede and death of 102 people. Makar Jyothi is supposed to be the divine light, appearing in the sky to pay tribute to lord Ayyappa. Similarly at the same place 52 people died in 1998 on the same date.

This raises multiple questions. It goes without saying that the government has to ensure that the civic arrangements have to be perfected even in the matters related to faith. Be it Kumbh mela or Haj, while the government should not interfere in the people's choices, the civic arrangements can not just be left to the bodies managing these events. There is a small problem here, some managements are very rigid and one recalls that at Sabarimala, few years ago the temple authorities refused to let a woman IAS officer, who was supposed to ensure that arrangements are in place, was refused entry to the temple on the ground that women of menstruating age group (15-45) are not permitted to enter the temple as Lord Ayyappa is a bachelor!

Sabarimala congregation of the 14th April is the second biggest religious congregation in the country. While there are various diverse interpretation of the history of Sabarimala shrine and Lord Ayyappa, one thing is very clear and that is the devotees also pay the homage to Waver, a Muslim. He is addressed as Waver Swami by the pilgrims. The Hindus believe that they must first visit this Waver mosque.

Some dimensions of Sabarimala episode are very shocking to say the least. The divine light is supposed to be the *Aarti*, devotional ritual with a lamp and song, offered by Sages to Lord Ayyappa. As such the reality is that the light is due to the huge chunks of camphor placed in urns which are burnt by the state electricity board officials on that day. Earlier Adivasis used to create fire as a devotion to the Lord. Many decades earlier the Adivasi ritual was going in to oblivion. This ritual has been taken over by the Temple trust, Ayyappa Devaswam, and through the state complicity burning of camphor was started at good distance from the temple. It was propagated that it is a divine light and different stories started being associated with the light. Gradually it was popularized that watching the divine light is a good omen, for which thousands and later lakhs of pilgrims started making a beeline for the area. To have the vantage point of view the people started congregating on the hill, which is crowded to the hilt. This also brought in good amount of money as the offering to the temple trust.

The government cannot be excused in any way for the lapse in the arrangement and being part of camphor burning to create 'divine light'. The temple trust can neither be excused for continuing this fraud, nor for interfering in the Government work, when it makes the rule that Government female officials cannot enter the precincts of this place for making the arrangements. With such massive loss of lives, the responsibility of the tragedy should be squarely placed on the heads of the authorities concerned. One is shocked to know that the minister in charge of temple affairs in Kerala has been aware of this fact but has not done anything to stop the man-made light being propagated off as the divine light inviting the hoards of pilgrims from all over. The Devaswom Minister G Sudhakaran openly said a couple of years ago that "I was present on the Makaravilakku day at the Sabarimala last season. I saw the celestial star and it is at that very time that Makaravilakku is lighted. There is no doubt about it that it is lighted by the men."

This also raises larger questions about the acts of our authorities, including the religious trusts. While one respects the faith of devotees, what does one do if one knows clearly that the particular event is man made and is being passed off as a divine happening. Our Constitution instructs us to promote the rational thought and scientific temper. In Kerala various groups working for rational thought have been struggling to bring to light the truth behind this phenomenon. They have

been campaigning to stop it, but to no avail. Faith often can be a big support system for society but one has also to know the difference between faith and blind faith. If we know the rational explanation about a phenomenon, should we sit over it or make it public. One also recalls that faith was constructed around the scientific phenomenon of 'capillary action' to spread the rumor that Lord Ganesha idol is drinking milk! And tons of milk went down the drain, with some top politicians endorsing the phenomenon, violating the basic norm of Indian Constitution.

The most difficult part of explaining matters of faith and opposing blind faith is the fact that faith is associated with religion and so a Benny Hinn will go on to give religious veneer to the well understood psychological phenomenon of hypnosis or hypnotherapy. Most of those struggling for social transformation for better society, better rights for deprived have opposed the blind faith and bypassed faith based understanding. Starting from Charvak of Lokayat tradition, to Lord Gautam Buddha, to the saints like Kabir, Tukaram to Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Dr Ambedkar all called for promotion of rational thought in their own way. Gandhi while recognizing the state of people in the society talked in the language of religion but kept the faith based rituals miles away. Nehru was most forthright in his opposition to the misuse of faith and talked for promotion of scientific temper, something which is not much in vogue in current times. Currently, misuse of faith is the order of the day. Nehru's emphasis on scientific temper and his opposition to blind faith has been a major pillar for growth of Modern India. One must see the complex situation prevailing today where we need to respect the people with all their frailties and still try to also put forth the rational view of things in an honest way.

Ram Puniyani

Ban practice of people rolling used food plates,

LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati on Saturday demanded an immediate ban on an alleged practice in Karnataka in which Scheduled Caste people are made to roll on used food plates made of leaves in the belief that it will cure skin diseases.

Continuing with this tradition for the treatment of skin diseases was inhuman, humiliating and derogatory, Ms. Mayawati said in a statement here, and demanded that a ban be imposed on the "scurrilous" tradition forthwith.

She issued the statement in reaction to a private news channel showing people belonging to the Scheduled Caste rolling on used food plates out side a temple in Karnataka.

Noting that the custom went against the right to equality enshrined in the Constitution, Ms. Mayawati said casteist elements were playing with the dignity of the Scheduled Caste people.

PTI

Albert Einstein quotes.....

I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the kind that we experience in ourselves. Neither can I nor would I want to conceive of an individual that survives his physical death; let feeble souls, from fear or absurd egoism, cherish such thoughts. I am satisfied with the mystery of the eternity of life and with the awareness and a glimpse of the marvelous structure of the existing world, together with the devoted striving to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the Reason that manifests itself in nature.

Idiot Cure

M. Sarath could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the verdict of the biopsy conducted on a growth in his ribs five months ago. How could a healthy 40 something like him be struck by cancer?

So when a friend recommended an alternative medicine practitioner based in Mumbai, he jumped at the suggestion. This healer often advertised on the so-called wellness channels on television. But after a few months of experimenting with promises of a miracle cure, he was back at Bangalore's HCG Hospital. By then, the disease had spread through the body.

"Timely medical intervention in the form of surgery followed by chemotherapy could have shrunk the tumor," points out Dr Pramod Chinder, consultant ortho-oncologist at HCG Hospital. Sarath's life expectancy today is four to five years. If he had responded well to surgery, he may have lived for another 20.

TV remedies for everything, from hair fall and hepatitis to conjunctivitis and cancer, are accessible to millions of viewers 24x7. According to 2009 figures these wellness channels do business to the tune of around Rs. 60 crore annually. They are viewed by around 10 million. Most of these channels air health programmes that propagate alternative healing practices that promise "complete recovery with zero side effects".

It is scary how some of these 'gurus' promise cures for even infectious diseases such as dengue and chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension,' says Dr Sandeep Buddhiraja, director, institute of internal medicine, Max Healthcare.

Allopaths complain that patients often abandon treatment halfway to try out natural remedies. "We get patients who suffer from gastritis even as they are undergoing chemotherapy. When we probe, we find that they have been taking ayurvedic medicine as well. These medicines contain mercuric salts, which can cause gastritis in certain cases," says Dr MS Belliappa, consultant radio-oncologist at the HCG Hospital.

TV doctors manage to put up a fairly convincing act. There are programmes where they use detailed diagrams and flow charts to explain why this juice or that powder or yoga on an empty stomach can help cure a disease.

However, the information imparted is usually half-baked. Viewers are rarely cautioned against the pitfalls of using natural remedies mindlessly. For instance, a popular TV yoga guru has for long propagated the goodness of bottle gourd-bitter melon juice to stem diabetes. But few knew that the raw juice of these vegetables could prove to be toxic under certain conditions.

Last week, the absence of this crucial piece of information cost Delhi-based scientist Sushil Kumar his life. For four years Kumar had followed this popular remedy to keep his diabetes under control. Unfortunately for him, the lassi glass of tauki-karela Juice he drank contained killer toxins.

Newspaper reports now say that many such incidents had been reported earlier from other parts of the country. In the absence of any legislation to monitor the content of these wellness channels, all kinds of untested tonics and pills are being hawked to millions of gullible viewers.

The world over, alternative medicines are becoming popular, but in India the problem is compounded by a unique factor. Says Dr Anoop Misra, director and head, department of diabetes and metabolic diseases, Fortis, "In India, religious issues add to the problem. People blindly follow their TV gurus. Alternative therapies are largely scientifically unproven. Most of these practices or formulae have been passed down the generations by word-of-mouth. Some have proved to be effective over a period of time, for instance, the Chinese remedy for malaria. But the effectiveness of most other such remedies remains questionable."

Aloe vera juice is another popular plant remedy. Its benefits include reduced inflammation and stronger immunity. Cans and bottles of this juice are easily available under various brands in the market. But the quality of their content is strongly suspect.

While the Indian Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 does govern the herbal medicine industry, it lays emphasis only on ensuring hygienic conditions in manufacturing units and the rigorous testing of raw material. But it mostly ignores critical factors such as the source of the raw material, the harvest and post-harvest conditions in the farms and fields, and the processing and manufacturing techniques. These need to be regulated as well.

In random surveys conducted by scientific bodies like the Centre for Science and Environment, it has been found that many of these brands may contain either too little or too much of the ingredients they claim to use. Plus, contraindications are not always mentioned on the labels of these concoctions.

A Dangerous Web

The personal computer is fast replacing the personal physician. The internet is littered with websites — both reliable and dubious — that offer everything you should know about your ailment — the symptoms, treatment possible side effects, cost of treatment, testimonials, access to support groups and more.

Trustworthy websites like www.webmd.com and www.mayoclinic.com are referred to by millions around the world and offer interesting user options: a comprehensive list of the most commonly used drugs along with user reviews, and what to expect of different diagnostic and lab tests. If you are about to undergo a surgical procedure, you can find information about how long it will take, what the procedure entails, the duration of post-op care and possible side effects.

While these websites empower people to make informed decisions about their health, they also spawn pill peppers who self-medicate, often with serious outcomes. Abhay Arora was down with possible viral fever and a quick Google search revealed that a first generation antibiotic is the most effective cure. He did not bother with consulting a doctor and simply treated himself with an OTC antibiotic. He woke up the next morning with angry rashes all over his body — he had developed a drug allergy. Arora was lucky to get away with just a rash.

Self-medication can land you in serious trouble. But that does not stop people from taking chances with their health. After all a visit to a neighborhood internet café costs much less than a visit to a doctor's clinic.

For instance, aloe *vera* juice is not advised for pregnant and lactating women. And the quantity of juice you consume is also important," says nutritionist Ishi Khosla. Similarly, *senna* leaf — a common natural remedy for constipation — if consumed carelessly can damage the kidneys. Wheat grass juice is another popular remedy for detox. TV doctors often prescribe it for patients undergoing chemotherapy. This can prove to be a source of infection though.

Exercise therapies shown on television too are leading to injuries and health problems. Dr IPS Oberoi, senior consultant orthopedic surgeon Artemis Health Institute, Gurgaon, says he regularly sees patients who have injured themselves while working out with a tele instructor. The spine, hip and calf muscles and the shoulders are most prone to such an injury.

Seema Sondhi, a Delhi-based yoga teacher, agrees with Oberoi. Her own mother-in-law has developed chronic backache after doing unsupervised yoga. She would switch on the television, sit on the bed and start imitating the *asanas* being shown on the screen. Now, she is on painkillers and cannot move much," says Sondhi.

In another case, Chandigarh school teacher Rachna Nigam found her left knee swelling after she started working out with an aerobics DVD in order to knock off some extra kilos. "I went over board with the intensity of the moves" says Nigam. Her doctor has put her on a course of anti inflammatory medication and advised her not to climb stairs.

Like Nigam, many people fail to realise that before starting on a workout routine the body needs to be prepared for the physical activity. Warm-up exercises help you do that. 'They also minimise the chances of an injury,' says Oberoi. But tele instructors often miss out this crucial part. In fact, what adds to the risk of a sprain or tear of muscle or tissue is when people start following the exercise programmes immediately without realising that, as beginners, they need to start with simpler exercises or *asanas*," explains Oberoi. If you are unfit and mindlessly ape the athletic instructors on TV chances are that you will land up with a slip disc, swollen knees or chronic muscle pain.

Most people do not realise that yoga may seem simple but requires thorough supervision and guidance. According to the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, which tracks sports injuries caused in exercise regimes that don't include equipment, nearly 4500 people ended up in the emergency room after yoga injuries in 2006, slightly fewer than the year before but still up 18 per cent since 2004. In 2001, The New England Journal of Medicine published an article that cites yoga as one of the many possible causes of damage to arteries in susceptible patients.

Even breathing exercises when done with incorrect technique can lead to complications. Certain *pranayamas* are not recommended for patients of high blood pressure and *kapalabhati* (a form of intense breathing) is contraindicated in heart diseases.

Shobit Dhar

Courtesy: TOI

Albert Einstein Quotes.....

- A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty - it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude; in this sense, and in this alone, I am a deeply religious man.
- I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings.
- The foundation of morality should not be made dependent on myth nor tied to any authority lest doubt about the myth or about the legitimacy of the authority imperil the foundation of sound judgment and action.
- I do not believe in immortality of the individual, and I consider ethics to be an exclusively human concern with no superhuman authority behind it.

Great Rationalist Justice R.A. Jahagirdar (Retd) passes away

Justice Jahagirdar was born on 15th August, the Independence Day, celebrated all over India. He certainly was a truly Independent Spirit. I met him for the first time on the occasion of the birth centenary of M.N.Roy and was very much impressed by his unassuming, friendly and helpful nature. Till then, being a Judge, he refrained from openly airing his views on public platforms. But after his retirement he zealously inculcated rationalist, atheist and humanist values in the youth grabbing every opportunity that came his way.

His judgments had a humane angle. Once a poor woman was accused of committing suicide and of trying to kill her child along with her. Justice Jahagirdar acquitted her, reasoning that since the woman had shouted for help she must have inadvertently fallen into the well (as she later claimed) and had no intention of killing her daughter. This was necessary because, he said, convicting the woman was convicting the innocent child and destroying her future. He had a very cheerful and jovial nature with a tinge of childlike mischief in it. On many occasions at CSSC Bandra and other places when snacks were offered, Justice Jahagirdar made it a point to take my photograph while I was eating, telling me he wanted to keep a record of my contribution to the cause!

A few years back he suffered a stroke. He was unconscious for over a week. Dr. Sharad Jahagirdar, his wife tirelessly nursed him day and night, knowing full well the gravity of the situation. He came out of it and although physically not his original self, mentally he was as alert as ever and had a perfect memory. He did contribute a lot to the rationalist cause after his recovery. His daughter and other relatives used to tease him for refusing to see the 'divine hand' in it. He gave all the credit to his wife and called her a modern 'Savitri'. But sadly enough, this did not last long and within a couple of years his health started deteriorating. The sad end came on the morning of 23rd February 2011.

The movement initiated by Rationalist Association of India and carried out despite insurmountable difficulties by Prof. RD Karve, began tapering off during the post independent era as the newly independent Indian society being enamored of the welfare state concept, secularism, Nehruvian socialism, Marxism, etc. felt no need for rationalism per se any more. But soon it was realized that all these isms cannot take care of human frailties like greed, hunger for power, lack of empathy, blind belief and fanaticism. Justice Jahagirdar was one of those who realized the importance of rationalism. Unless reason is given the primacy of place in our mental attitude, we cannot get rid of these curses. "Reason" magazine was the house journal of Rationalist Association of India. The publication was very popular among rationalists in India and abroad right from its first issue, way back, in 1931 until its last one in 1942. Justice Jahagirdar brought out a series of user friendly CDs by scanning the pages of all the old issues, lest the precious intellectual asset be lost forever and distributed the CDs to various educational institutions and universities.

He maintained that rationalists do not swear by any set of principles or tenets like other systems of philosophy and therefore do not degenerate into any dogma or religion. It is a mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience independent of arbitrary assumptions or authority. He, therefore, advocated rationalism on every platform made available to him. He also believed that decisions in all walks of life political, social, educational and health should be subjected to rationalist thoughts and arguments and should never be based on emotional inspiration.

With his own funds, he founded the 'Rationalist Foundation Trust' in 1995 to inculcate rationalism in our society by arranging lectures, publishing printed material and helping individuals who suffer for advocating rationalism. He used to tour all over Maharashtra on the invitation from progressive associations and movements and used their platform to spread rational values in those movements. He wrote a large number of articles on various aspects of rationalism and published pamphlets on this subject.

Suman Oak

Death Sentence: Some observations

I have already written on death sentence. My said article has been published in Radical Humanist. I have shown, in that article, how all over the world, public opinion is veering against death sentence. Humanists, by their philosophy, are against death sentence.

Amnesty International is, from the beginning, against it. Human rights activists are against death sentence. The U.N. General Assembly has asked for a moratorium on death sentence. India is one of the countries that still retains death sentence. Statistics show that 138 nations have so far abolished death sentence. Our own neighbours, Nepal and Bhutan, have joined the abolitionist camp. Philippines and South Korea have also joined abolitionist camp. Japan, which at one time was zealous about death sentence, has recently abolished it. The following are the supporters of the abolition:

- President of Chico;
- Canada;
- Great Britain;
- European Union;
- Turkey;
- South Africa;
- State of Massachusetts (USA).

A report called "Lethal Lottery: the Death penalty in India" compiled jointly by Amnesty International and People's Union of Civil Liberties" (Tamilnadu and Puducherry) has, apart from other points, mentioned lack of uniformity and consistency in awarding death sentence.

The Law Commission of India has upheld the death sentence in India on the ground that public opinion demands it or justifies it. Bachan Singh was not before the Law Commission. Bachan Singh pointed out that Judges are ill-equipped to capture public opinion. Sometimes, not infrequently, public opinion may run counter to constitutionalism and law. Well known case is that of Bhagalpur blinding where people came in support of illegal blinding.

To repeat, the Law Commission of India has opined that death sentence deserves to be retained. In the year 2005, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who apparently is against death sentence, called a public debate on the subject. It has been found in the USA that several people who were innocent had been sentenced to death. This has been established by studies of D.N.A. Unfortunately, in India there is no study of this kind. Amnesty International and PUCL in a joint study called "Lethal Lottery Publication" has condemned death sentence. It is not necessary to dwell more on the desirability of abolition of death sentence. The world opinion is now almost veering around its abolition. The land of Buddha and Gandhi deserves a homage.

On 29th November, 2008, the Home Minister mentioned in the Rajya Sabha that 44 mercy Petitions are pending before the President. These are pending since 1998 and 1999. This shows how callous we are. Unfortunately, till 1999 they were not attended to by the Home Minister on whose recommendation the President acts. Now she has commuted the death sentence of 18 convicts. How does the President exercise the powers of commutation?

Article 72 of the Constitution confers power on the President, among other things, to commute death sentence. It is an executive power to be exercised on the advice of the Home Minister. The judiciary does not come in the picture at all. It is not a judicial power, so the convict cannot insist that he should be heard.

A person has been convicted and sentenced by a Judge who must be regarded as someone trained in law. Why should such a person be pardoned? Why should the President (or the Governor in some cases) be given such a power? Some people still think such a power should not be available by law or Constitution.

From time to time power to commute death sentence into sentence of life imprisonment has been exercised by the President. It is a matter partly legal, partly ethical. That is why the Constitution does not enumerate the circumstances in which such power should be exercised. It is a matter of discretion. Courts cannot interfere with such discretion. The Courts have limited power of judicial review in order to ensure that the President has considered all the relevant material and to see that the President has not ignored a circumstance which is vital for the decision.

The Law Commission of India (1967) noted that there are matters which have not been considered by the Court where hands are tied down by the evidence led before it. Yet, death sentence may require reconsideration because (1) some crucial facts were not before the Court; (2) the facts may not have been placed in the proper manner and (3) Acts indicting innocence may be discovered after the trial.

In 1925, the U.S. Supreme Court pointed out that executive clemency exists to afford relief from hardness or from undue harshness or evident mistakes. It was pointed out again that there must be some authority to ameliorate or avoid particular judgments.

Take for example the case of Nalini in Tamilnadu. She has a child born in jail. She is in jail for the last 18 years. She has not taken any active part in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The Advisory Board of Tamilnadu says "No" to her release. Why?

More irrational has been a recent decision of the Supreme Court of USA. One Teresa, a widow, was married to one Julian who had a stepson from his previous wife. After some years, Teresa developed a thirst for Julian's property and the insurance on his son. In order to appropriate both, she decided to kill both of them. For this purpose she hired one Mathew and Rodney.

On 30th October Teresa left the door open to facilitate Mathew and Rodney to enter the house quietly. The murder took place. Both Mathew and Rodney, along with Teresa, were arrested, tried and convicted.

Here comes the rub. Rodney was given life sentence; Mathew was given life sentence. Shockingly, Teresa, who had not pulled the trigger, was given death sentence. Why? Both Mathew and Rodney had cooperated in the investigation. So what? A woman who, no doubt, arranged the death of her husband. She was not the perpetrator of the crime. The trial Court called her the head of a serpent. Her mercy Petition was rejected by the Governor. State of Virginia has recently convicted a 40 year old woman. Criminal procedure in Virginia reeked of inconsistencies. Lack of consistency is one of the arguments for abolition.

In 1980 the Indian Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of death sentence. Firstly the Constitution itself mentions death sentence. Secondly, law in fact lays down life sentence first and then death sentence. It laid down that death sentence should be given in the rarest of rare case, a feature not uniformly followed by all. In a recent judgment, the Supreme Court has clarified that if the accused is not of criminal mind and could be rehabilitated, his life should not be eliminated.

Justice R.A. Jahagirdar (Retd)

The Rational Case for Irrational Thinking

*You'll need more than logic to persuade people of your case.
For believers in rationality, the modern world is often a frustrating and bewildering place.*

Despite the many and manifest successes of science, it seems ever harder to penetrate the fog of superstition, magical thinking and prejudice that infects most human belief systems. Quack medicine, astrology, supernatural beings and denialist movements are not just alive in the 21st century, they are thriving. Herein lies a paradox for rationalists.

Those who find rational arguments persuasive naturally assume that others do too, and that the way to win a debate is simply to employ a cold-eyed blend of objectivity, data and logic. And if at first that doesn't succeed, try, try again, but more forcefully. Even then, success is far from guaranteed - and for good reason: the more we learn about irrational beliefs, the clearer it becomes that they are perfectly normal. Human beings are not wired for logic. Irrationality is our default state, and overcoming it is hard work. The dream of a glorious future when the march of progress automatically exorcises our demons will always remain a dream.

The more we learn about irrational beliefs, the clearer it becomes that they are perfectly normal. In *How weird are you? Oddball minds of the western world* we report on research revealing that rational, analytical thinking is alien to most people. We like to think that western societies are more logical and rational. But there is a good reason why this 10 per cent or so of the world's population is labelled "western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic" - aka WEIRD.

Among the WEIRD, irrational thinking proliferates - and always has. Take denial, for example. We tend to think of scientific denial movements as a modern phenomenon, but they are not. Almost as soon as the theory of general relativity was published in 1915 it was being savaged by opponents on less-than-scientific grounds. Many opposed it because they saw it as a threat to the established order, part of the widespread social and political unrest of the time, while others were motivated by religion or anti-Semitism. That movement eventually dwindled, but has recently resurfaced in a different guise, showing that irrationality will always find a way.

What are we to do? Yes, rationality is the best way to solve problems and move forward, but we have to now focus the forces of rationality on developing an even deeper understanding of irrational thinking. Stuart Vyse of Connecticut College in New London has highlighted our natural urge to find cause and effect in coincidences. And he suggests that superstitions are seen as an insurance policy, a variant of "Pascal's wager", referring to how the 17th-century philosopher thought that it was rational to believe in God, just in case.

Shelley Taylor at the University of California in Los Angeles has done research to show how "positive illusions" - such as an unrealistic optimism, or an illusion of personal control - can offer psychological benefits, particularly in times of stress. The more we understand about irrationality and why rational arguments fail, the better placed we are to apply rational thought to win over hearts as well as minds. Call it the rational case for irrational thinking

Courtesy: New Scientist

Einstein quotes...

A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.

How to Understand Evolution

All religions consistently attack evolution theory. Many theologians struggle to disprove evolution happenings. There are creationists and intelligent design propagandists who put all their effort to weaken evolution theory. Some fundamentalists approached court of law to teach oppose evolution theory in educational institutions and to retain creation holy myths.

Poor fellows, they all faced miserable failures. Yet they strive to sustain their make belief stories in the name of god, religion, and revelations. They wish to do business with the weakness of human beings. In this process they spread several false things about evolution.

1. The major false propaganda is that humans came from apes and so why not apes evolve into humans?

This is nonsensical propaganda in a very unscientific way. Humans did not evolve from apes. Humans and apes are similarities in evolution. Both came from common ancestors in the past. Homo habilis, Homo neanderthalensis, Homo erectus were like human like species that evolved and extinct in the past. In that long process humans remained.

2. Another false propaganda is about the gaps in fossils. If evolution is true how can the gaps are explained?

But they ignored about intermediate fossils that were discovered. This was proved in birds, dinosaurs, and therapsids. Between reptiles and mammals therapsids were found. Similarly in the evolution several intermediate fossils were found. That was conclusively established in human evolution. Before hominids branched off at least 12 stages of fossils were discovered. Paleontologists found with much difficulty all such intermediate stages. Normally it is difficult to have a fossil of dead animal. Unless it is saved from scavenger, the traces disappear. Same is case with plant. It is lucky some such were found.

3. There are no arguments for creationists and hence they create all hurdles in the scientific discoveries. One such query is: Why fossil record is not showing gradual change if at all evolution is gradual?

In the stable state many fossils are left. In the evolution one species changes to another rapidly from geological point of view.. In scientific language it is called punctuated equilibrium. During the process one species breaks away and separated from its ancestors It is called little founder. Such small group transforms very quickly. The fossils from such rapid change may be difficult to trace. But the new changed species would retain the phenotype that can be observed. This punctuation is recorded and there is ample proof for that.

4. Creationists would never stop to put hurdles. They turn to another question: Who has seen evolution?

In the evolutionary scientific evidence not one but many branches of science are deeply involved. The evidence gathered by various branches converged to establish the evolution conclusively. These scientific branches are: Genetics, Biology, anatomy, physiology, zoology, botany, molecular biology, paleontology, geography and several others. The conclusive evidence for evolution emerged from fossils which converge. It is not single fossil study. Of late the special study of virus, bacteria gave lot of scope how evolution happens. Environmental pressures are changing organisms which have short reproductive cycles.

5. In modern evolutionary conclusive proofs NATURAL SELECTION has become the key word. It should not be mistaken as chance or even random. In the evolutionary process natural selection eliminates the mistakes but sustains the gains. Behind evolution there is cumulative selection is clear.

6. Creationists produce bulk of books against evolution and in that laborious effort they cite human eye as typical example for intelligent design. There also they failed. Any student who simply studies the inside of eye will clearly understand that it is anything but intelligent. The light that received by the eye will not see in straightforward way. The photons have to go through cornea and then through lens, then through aqueous fluid, blood vessels, ganglion cells, amacrine cells-both horizontal and bipolar. Then they reach the light sensitive rods and cones which convert into neural impulse. After that they are sent to visual cortex which lies at the back of the brain. There the process occurs into meaningful patterns. No intelligent designer will create eye in such topsy-turvy structure. Natural selection explained how the whole process evolved with the available material. That is the process the eye evolved in the long time.
7. Then comes the weakest attack from creationists that it is only theory and not fact. Perhaps they do not know that in scientific method how theory is established. The theory is tested and proved based on the hypothesis. That is common thing in all branches of science. In the courts of law also the creationists could establish their view point on this point. Evolution is natural law with explanation and testable which is conclusive. If any evidence goes contrary evolutionists are willing to abide by it but no such thing occurred so far.
8. Evolution as branch of science is self corrective. Mistakes are taken and when proofs are given, the theory once again establishes itself. There are many such self corrections done by evolutionists in the process. Creationists can only throw stones but never contribute to the growth of human improvement.
9. There are few who point out that second law thermodynamics is against evolution. They forgot that it is only applicable for closed systems and not to the universe. Hence their failure is once again proved.
10. The last lame theory developed by creationists is that science cannot establish for ethics, morality and hence there is need for god, creator etc. Here also they failed. Morality is evolved inherently among species and highly developed among humans. Human is essentially moral which emerged from evolution. What the creationists claim is only God fearing morality which is not human.

Richard Dawkins called the evolution as GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH.

Dr. Narisetti Innaiah

Albert Einstein quotes.....

A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive.

Astrology is a Science: Bombay HC

Astrology has been debunked by most world scientists including India's renowned physicist Prof. Yash Pal. However, it is "science" in India. The Bombay High Court reaffirmed this on Thursday when it dismissed a PIL that had challenged astrology as science. The PIL was filed by an NGO, Janhit Manch that had sought action against 'fake' astrologers, tantriks, practitioners of Vastu shastra etc.

"So far as prayer related to astrology is concerned, the Supreme Court has already considered the issue and ruled that astrology is science. The court had in 2004 also directed the universities to consider if astrology science can be added to the syllabus. The decision of the apex court is binding on this court," observed the judges.

The judges also took on record an affidavit submitted by the Union government. The Centre had in its affidavit stated that astrology is 4000 years old 'trusted science' and the same does not fall under the preview of The Drugs and Magical Remedies Act (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954.

"The said Act does not cover astrology and related sciences. Astrology is a trusted science and is being practiced for over 4000 years," said an affidavit filed by Dr R Ramakrishna, deputy drug controller (India), west zone.

"The said Act is aimed at prohibiting misleading advertisements relating to drugs and magic remedies. The Act does not cover and / or relate to astrology and / or allied sciences like Palmistry, Vaastu Shastra etc. In view thereof, a purported ban on practices promoting astrology and related sciences sought by the petitioner, which is a time tested science more than 4000 years old is totally misconceived and unjustifiable," says the affidavit.

The (PIL) filed by Janhit Manch and its convener Bhagwanji Raiyani, along with his associate Dattaram Kumkar, had questioned the validity of predictions by many well-known astrologers. The PIL, which ran into more than 100 pages pointed to several cases, including that of Indira Gandhi and Charan Singh becoming prime ministers, despite opposite predictions.

Representing the Union government, advocate Advait Sethna told the court that even the SC had accepted that astrology was a science and many universities had included it as a subject. Advocate for Maharashtra government, Bharat Mehta too supported the stand taken by the Union government. Mehta submitted an affidavit filed by the food and drugs administration (FDA) department which said that necessary action is being taken against the guilty under the Drugs and Magical Remedies Act.

The PIL had urged the authorities to ban articles, advertisements, episodes and practices promoting astrology and its related subjects like vastu, reiki, feng shui, tarot, palmistry, zodiac signs and rashifal.

Hetal Vyas

Courtesy: TNN, Feb 3, 2011

Albert Einstein quotes...

It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly. If something is in me which can be called religious then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it.

Such Phony Godmen!

Narendra Maharaj was spreading his tentacles all over Konkan, Gova and Western Maharashtra quite rapidly. People rushed to Nanij for treatment in thousands. 'Narendra Leelamrit' (exhilarating pursuits of Narendra) a book written on this Maharaj and published in the name of his wife had become a point of heated discussion. This book contained the innumerable miracles performed by the Maharaj that surpassed all the marvelously incredible stories so far told and retold. The ANS strongly objected to the claims of miracles made in this book because they boost superstitious mind set. The 'Janajagaran Samiti' (association for awakening) of Konkan too had started a movement against this miracle mongering. The ANS movement took a firm stand. They demanded that since he has never explained the miracles he is supposed to have performed as advertised in the book, Narendra Maharaj should come forward and verify publicly the truth of his miracles so loudly extolled by his devotees. The whole of Konkan was agitated about this public confrontation with the Maharaj. The atmosphere was tense but also full of curiosity. The district administrator and the chief police officer held a joint meeting with ANS and the devotees of the Maharaj and decided upon the rules to be followed during the question-answer session. Accordingly ANS was required to give 7 questions in writing which the Maharaj too will answer in writing. 25 members from each side should attend the meeting. The Maharaj insisted on receiving the list of question immediately during this meeting itself. ANS took the stand that since the questions will be based on his book, 'Narendra Leelamrit', there is no need to submit them in advance. Finally it was decided to give the list of questions fifteen minutes before the programme.

We, 25 ANS activists reached the venue in the afternoon. On the hill where the Math is situated ten thousand devotees had gathered. They had come from faraway distances although this was not an occasion of any pilgrimage, for, it is said that the Maharaj had issued a 'whip' to all his devotees to be present at the occasion. There was massive Police 'Bandobast'. At 11.45 we handed over a list of questions to a representative of the Maharaj in the presence of the Tahasildar. It was immediately taken to him. At 2 minutes past 12 o'clock, Narendra Maharaj arrived at 'Kunjavan' (venue of the programme) with note pad containing his written answers to our questions. We were welcome by a Physician from Kolhapur on behalf of the Maharaj. He told us that Narendra Maharaj is a follower of the glorious path of spirituality inherited by the Indian culture.

Next I started asking questions, in fact reading the questions from the list one by one; and Narendra Maharaj answered them in that order. Thus 7 questions were asked and answered. But before the questions were asked I presented the following preamble to the programme explaining our stand. I said:
'Dear Narendra Maharaj,

For the last two years we have been challenging you through public meetings and letters in the news papers to validate your claims of miracles that you performed and are described in the book 'Narendra Leelamrit'. But you have failed to answer any question all this time. So I am compelled to ask you these questions in writing publicly. If you could not answer these questions satisfactorily or avoided to answer them and abandoned the meeting it will be declared as your inability to do so. With this public clarification I am going to ask the questions.

You are expected to give a quick, precise and written answer. Journalists will be given Xerox copies of your written answers so that no one will have any reason to complain. We are meeting here to obtain explanations to the objections raised by ANS against you, time and again. If Maharaj wants to ask any questions to ANS he is most welcome at the ANS Central Office at Satara, where all his questions will be answered in writing. The date of the visit for this purpose should be fixed in this meeting. Now the questions-

The book, 'Narendra Leelamrit' has been published by Mrs. Supriya N. Sule, the wife of Narendra Maharaj, on behalf of the Narendra Maharaj Trust, Nanij of which Shri Narendra Maharaj is the trustee. So whatever is written in the book must be authorized and official. In the first line of the preface of this book, it is mentioned that Narendra Maharaj is the latest incarnation of Gajanan Maharaj. Does Narendra Maharaj too claim to be the incarnation of Gajanan Maharaj?

However Shri Gajanan Sansthan of Shegaon have declared that the person who claims to be the incarnation of Gajanan Maharaj is a fraud. What is your opinion regarding this?

In chapter 19th, first edition of 'Narendra Leelamrit' on page 200, it is mentioned that Mrs. Madhavi Mohan Limaye, sister in law of Mr. Limaye was given a blow after which the white spots on her skin disappeared. Mrs. Limaye in her hand out to the news papers as well as in her public speech has declared the above account as a blatant lie. So we want to ask Narendra Maharaj, why does he lie so blatantly and is it proper to give a blow to a lady in this manner?

In this book it is mentioned that the relatives of Shri Subhash Kadam and the sister in law of Shri Pandurang Bhandari were revived to life by the Maharaj after they were declared dead (chapter 2, page 14 and chapter 9, page 79 both 1st edition.) ANS repeatedly had asked for evidence that these individuals were declared dead by a qualified doctor after examining them properly and that the Maharaj revived them to life after that. But no such evidence was offered for the last two years. If Narendra Maharaj fails to provide any evidence regarding this claim even today the Samiti will deem this too to be lie. Does the Maharaj have anything to offer by way of clarification in this regard?

Sunanda D. Bhagawat from Nanij and Geeta Rade from Mekhi had lost all their hair and become bald. But because of blessings by the Maharaj, the former lady started growing hair on her head within three days and the latter took seven visits to overcome her baldness. This claim is made in the 5th chapter of the book (page 42-43, 1st edition). To verify his power in this connection, we want to send 5 bald individuals to the Maharaj. If they start growing hair on their pate about a hand span in length, within three days or after 7 visits, as mentioned in 'Narendra Leelamrit', ANS will surrender to the Maharaj and become his devotee. But in case, it does not happen, the Maharaj will have to apologize to the people for deceiving them. Does Maharaj agree to this? If the Maharaj claims that only his devotees can benefit from his blessings and not the ANS workers, he may name five bald individuals from his devotees attending today's meeting and arrange to grow hair on their heads within 15 days or accept that the Maharaj is deceiving people by spreading false stories of his miracles. What is the response of the Maharaj?

On page 181 of chapter 18 of this book one more incredible claim is made. It says Narendra Maharaj knows a Mantra that annuls the effect of poison after snakebite and he has taught this Mantra to Arvind Pandit. We request the Maharaj to prove this power of his publicly in the meeting. Maharaj will choose the devotees himself and Samiti will provide poisonous snake. The devotees who offer to be bitten by the snake and the Maharaj who claims to save them with his divine power will be solely responsible for whatever consequences that may occur. The names of the devotees willing to undertake this test can be declared and the date of the experiment be fixed in today's meeting. Does Maharaj agree to this?

All the content of the book 'Narendra Leelamrit' which is being sold everywhere, must be pertaining to Narendra Maharaj, since it is published by the wife of the Maharaj on behalf of the Narendra Maharaj Trust, Nanij. The Maharaj should accept this fact (regarding the ridiculously exaggerated claims) or withdraw the book from the market and apologize those individuals who suffered by believing in his divine powers and compensate for their loss. Does the Maharaj agree?

In the 'Narendra Gatha' journal of August 1998, published by your trust, it is mentioned (on page 15, 19) that a world war will break out on 19th of July 1999. Only those people who are the devotees of the Maharaj and those whom the Maharaj wants to save will survive the disaster. The Maharaj should reveal whatever scientific evidence he has regarding this and in case it does not happen tell the public what punishment he should be served with for raising panic and deceiving people. The Maharaj refused to keep his promise of giving answers in writing right at the beginning. But since the whole programme was being video filmed, ANS did not insist on written answers.

In answering the first question Narendra Maharaj accepted that he does not call himself the incarnation of Gajanan Maharaj; but, he added 'the people think me to be his incarnation. This book is a compilation of the experiences of my

devotees and the stories told by them.' In the next question he totally refused to have given a blow to Mrs. Madhavi Limaye. (However as soon as we left he announced to his devotees that he had to give a blow to Mrs. Limaye for her spiritual enhancement.) Answer to the third question was quite peculiar. The Maharaj explained, 'those individuals were not declared dead by the doctor; the villagers thought that they were dead. The doctors had given up all hopes and the relatives of those individuals fell at my feet and would not leave me. I told them that I was helpless and they should go back. However the person whom the relatives mistook for dead, gradually recovered. I don't know the causality of this entire episode.' The fourth question too was answered in the same manner; i.e. Maharaj himself does not claim any miracles or miraculous powers. The miracle happens to be the experience of the devotees. All his answers denied any miracles whatsoever. Now whether this is accepting defeat or trying to escape from the challenge will have to be left to the reader to decide. While answering the 5th question he said, 'look here, I am a spiritual man. Thousands and thousands of people come here. There are cases of snake bites too among them. I do not keep an account of who recovered from the bite and do not claim to neutralize the poison of any snakes. Let the people decide whether the magazine 'Narendra Leelamrit' should continue or be withdrawn from the market; who am I or you to decide it?' To answer the 6th question, he explained, 'the Gathas- anthologies of the works of many saints are compiled by their devotees on the basis of their own experiences.' The last question he answered somewhat differently. He said, 'regarding the third World war, I received clear indication during my spiritual retreat that it will break out in the middle of 1999.' He also clarified that there is no intension of spiritual scaremongering in this and it is, to the contrary, an attempt to establish peace. To top it all, Narendra Maharaj declared that he too is working to eradicate superstition; and the veterans among the ANS activists should guide him in this effort. The Maharaj who arrived with his notepad for answering our questions looked terrified; his hand holding the note pad was trembling; his teeth clattered and he kept asking for water all the time.

After the question-answer session of the challenge process was over, we returned to Ratnagiri. There in the press conference we exhibited the filming of the whole episode. Next day many newspapers published the news on their front pages to the effect that the claim of miracles by Narendra Maharaj was totally defeated.

Dr Narendra Dabholkar
(Translated by Suman Oak)

Albert Einstein quotes.....

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that could cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.

The most beautiful and most profound experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their primitive forms - this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness.

Saints and Fakirs

India is infested with saints, sadhus, sanyasis, fakirs and other religious charlatans too numerous to mention. One meets them at every corner. The mentality of the uneducated Indian masses forms a particularly favorable environment for them to flourish in. They are privileged beggars and cannot be treated with contempt. For most of them lay claim to supernatural power and if they condescend to beg, it is only to provide the faithful with the opportunity to practise the noble virtue of Charity.

The respect that is usually accorded to them does not depend on their religious elevation, whatever that may mean since a Hindu will respect a Mohomedan fakir as much as a Hindu Sadhu or a Christian saint. All these have one common characteristic. The way to become a sadhu or fakir is to display some eccentricity of dress or behavior. This produces an impression that these people are, in some occult way, superior to the common run of mortals and being on intimate terms with God, can arrange interviews with him or even induce him to listen to prayers and change his divine intentions accordingly. Of course you can choose your eccentricity to suit your nature. You may for instance, lengthen your shirt into a robe long enough to cover all your sins or perhaps reduce your clothing or give it up altogether like Jain Munis. You may grow your hair and beard to extraordinary lengths or shave it off altogether. You may decorate your body in various ways or go about with a serpent coiled round your neck if you have the nerve. If you are an educated man with university qualifications you can assume a Sanskrit or a Latin name if your own is not sonorous enough to make any impression. A Sadhu with a university degree is immediately pounced upon by people is a proof of the worthlessness of modern knowledge and the vast superiority of ancient lore.

It is a patent fact that nothing produces such a universal impression as eccentricities in dress or outward behavior. Without attributing any motives, it can hardly be denied that great deal of the vast influence acquired by such distinguished personalities as Mrs. Besant and Mahatma Gandhi is due to this factor, which of course does not mean that they have not many excellent qualities.

Eccentricity in itself is not a thing to be condemned wholesale because no change of any kind would ever be made if there was nobody eccentric enough to introduce it, and there can be no progress without change. But a change adopted with a genuine cause for reform can be easily distinguished from one adopted to give an impression of superiority. In the first case, imitation is welcome, in the second it is not. Jain Munis do not wish everybody to go naked because that would diminish their importance, nor would matted locks mean anything if everybody had them.

In spite of the doubtful ways in which Sadhus acquire their influence, it must be admitted that there are good sadhus and bad ones. And if it comes to that, are not politicians known often to acquire influence in more than doubtful ways? The lust for domination is so ingrained in human nature that it often underlies public exhibitions of humility. We may condemn it, but we must admit that it is practically impossible to eradicate it. The crucial test therefore lies in the use that is made of the influence so acquired. The well known saints of Maharashtra were certainly well intentioned people, whatever the actual result of their activities may have been. Some of them were not only excellent poets, though their poetry was mostly religious, but even social reformers in their own way. Some of them disapproved of caste distinctions and behaved accordingly. But as in the case of Mahatma Gandhi, even their followers never accepted their teachings in this respect, because to them it was merely another eccentricity permissible only to Saints, never to ordinary mortals. This was the direct result of the importance they give to religion, which always includes all current superstitions. People will worship Saints and mahatmas, will even build temples to them, but never imitate them. The sins of a Saint may be cancelled by his merits in the religious code, but to ordinary people, they are sins still. This is why the total effect of life of even a good Saint is on the whole never good.

These good Saints are however a very small minority. Most of them tend to misuse their easily acquired power. The petty saints indulge in petty deceits, the abler ones acquire a large following, consisting largely of women, as Saints are mostly men, for religion is more often connected with sex attraction than religious people ever dreamed of. One married saint in particular, an educated man who persuaded his wife to join him in fakirism, has been known to announce to his followers that a favoured female disciple of his had been his wife in previous lives, and consequently had the right to live with him in this life. Whether the wife who was already married to him had anything to say about it,

is not known. More often, however, their role of saints obliges them to pretend indifference to all worldly matters. But, of course, this supposed indifference itself can be turned to good account. Since luxury and poverty are the same to them, why should they wound the feelings of their followers who are so anxious to maintain them in luxury? So they condescend to accept everything that comes their way, fine clothes, first class travel, succulent food, unless the pretence of living without food is part of the dodge. Again, just for the spiritual uplift and salvation of their fair followers, they accept their personal attendance and services such as massage, if nothing more. In any case, those of them who are not sexually abnormal are certainly not starved in this matter any more than in food.

The profession of a sadhu seems to become more naturally to a man than a woman, who often lacks the initiative. A man becomes a sadhu as a woman may become a prostitute, merely choosing the most convenient way of earning a living, and the man has this advantage over a prostitute that there is no Social Purity League to hound him out of the town, nor any Prevention of Fakirism Act.

The modern variety of fakir is spiritualist, who however requires a confederate, usually a woman, to act as a supposed medium. It is difficult to understand why living on the earnings of a medium is not a crime. It should really be a much greater one than living on the earnings of a prostitute, since the latter serves some useful purpose and need not be dishonest, while the medium is a cheat if she is not an idiot or insane. Most mediums have been proved to be cheats, but some idiots will still believe that they are honest when they are not found out.

A priest is a nuisance, but even he renders some service to religious people, but a saint is merely a parasite.

A saint or sadhu is supposed to have his passions under perfect control, yet some of them fly into a rage if you do not bend low enough to salute them. A friend once induced me to visit one and as a matter of politeness, I saluted him as I would an equal, but would not for a moment think of touching his feet as other people were doing. He immediately started pouring a volley of filthy abuse against everything modern. The faithful followers of a saint will even drink the water in which his feet have been washed, or which runs out when he is bathing. No wonder they get all kinds of diseases and stick to him all the more in the hope of being cured. I have known well-to-do people squandering any amount of money on sadhus of this type and leaving their children in penury. Of course religious people are under no moral obligation to look after their children. God is supposed to do that, while they prefer to look after sadhus, whom apparently God cannot look after.

These so-called unworldly sadhus accumulate vast estates and their heirs fight for the inheritance in mundane courts. Even religious heads of different sects have been known to do it. Poverty is only pretence. The sufferings of a saint principally arise from the pretence that his wants are few and under perfect control. This is sometimes inconvenient, as saints are often surrounded by the faithful who will give them no peace, but after all they cannot watch all the time, and a saint can always claim a few hours privacy if desirable, on the pretence of religious meditation. It may be uncomfortable to be naked if the weather is really cold, but sadhus can always smear ash all over the body. This orthodox form of toilet powder serves the same purpose as the modern form and protects the skin quite well from the inclemencies of the weather.

One class of saints or sadhus consists of perfectly harmless idiots, whose natural eccentricities make them saints without any pretence. If they have hallucinations, so much the better, as that gives them a religious status. In short anybody can become a sadhu if so inclined, with a little natural idiocy or cunning.

Is there any remedy for this state of things? The only remedy is obviously to try to change the environment, the gullible mentality of the multitude, without which these gentry would be like fish out of water. The only way to effect the change is the right kind of education, meaning mostly scientific education, for it is only in scientific subjects that the mind is trained to ask the reason why. In literary subjects one has very often to accept things without question, like rules of grammar for instance. The only training which will be useful against saints and fakirs is scientific training. Let us therefore fight with all our energy for scientific education.

R.D. Karve

Woman: Her Exploitation and Rebellion

In this world many things seem to happen randomly. Even life on earth, they say, has come about accidentally; but not woman's enslavement. The inferior status to which woman is reduced has not come to pass naturally; it has been wrought by man though he prefers to believe otherwise. At the dawn of human history when the ability to give birth to a human child was valued man tended to respect woman, like mother earth for her power of procreation till man's role in that process was comprehended. As the nomadic tribes gradually settled as primitive but somewhat stable cattle raising agricultural society, more children meant more work and combat force. A woman who produced more children was respected more; a childless one was despised. Man's superior physical strength and possessive instinct, his urge to ascertain that the children under his roof are his own, enslaved women and used them as machines of procreation. Woman's 'mother instinct' made her comply with man's wish.

As more stability brought a reservoir of agricultural products, the concepts of ownership and inheritance of land, paternity, patriarchal households and man's superiority over woman evolved. Religion, an institution made by 'men' was and is of much help in subjugating women. Many in India believe that the pristine Vedic Religion honoured woman like a goddess but under the influence of other religions and culture enslaved her later, giving examples of Gargi and Maitreyee to support their pet belief. But the fact is that throughout the history of human civilization man has exploited and enslaved woman.

To demonstrate this, we shall examine three episodes; one from the Vedic period, another from 19th century India under British rule and a third from 20th century India during the freedom struggle and after achieving independence. They illustrate not only how woman has been exploited throughout history but also how bravely she has been fighting against it.

Madhavi: a machine that produced world conquerors

Madhavi was the daughter of the great king Yayati. This story from Mahabharat although not very popular does tell us what the men of those days thought about their women and how they treated them. A princess like Madhavi was no exception. The story goes like this:

The sage Vishwamitra who was born a Kshatriya was elevated to the status of a Brahmin by Dharma (the deity of religiosity) and became a Brahmarshi. He was so pleased with his new status that he released Galav another young sage attending on him from his tutelage. But Galav did not want to leave Vishwamitra without paying him Guru Dakshina. The Guru wanted to free his disciple without Dakshina but Galav insisted on knowing what his Guru wanted in return for the tutoring. Exasperated Vishwamitra asked Galav to get him 800 snow-white horses with black ears.

Galav got himself into a fix with no clue as to how to obtain those many horses of the rarest variety. Galav consulted his friend Garud and both approached king Yayati who was a friend of Garud. Yayati himself at that time was in rather strained circumstances. But in order not to disappoint his friend Garud and refuse Galav what he asked for, Yayati offered him his lovely daughter Madhavi for whose hand gods, men and daemons all vied with each other. The king told Galav that he can offer her to a rich king and demand those peculiar horses as bride-price. Any king would accept Madhavi for a wife, he added, as she was blessed with the ability to produce brave sons capable of conquering the world.

The obedient daughter followed Galav who approached the richest king of the day, Haryashcha of Ayodhya. Galav offered him Madhavi in exchange of 800 snow-white horses with black ears. Even this rich king had only 200 such horses and offered to have Madhavi for his wife only till she bore him a son. Madhavi was duly returned to Galav after she delivered one brave son. The 200 horses had to be kept with the king for a while till Galav could arrange for the rest of them. Next Galav approached Divodas the king of Kashi. He too enjoyed this lovely princess, begot a son and

returned Madhavi to Galav along with 200 snow-white horses with black ears. To get the remaining number of horses, Galav took Madhavi to Ushinar, the King of Bhoj. This king was childless and declared that he was marrying Madhavi not for lust but only to get a son. All the same he took Madhavi to many beautiful sights and thoroughly enjoyed her. He too could give Galav only 200 horses and had to return Madhavi to Galav.

Finally Galav returned to his Guru Vishwamitra with Madhavi and those 600 horses and told him that he could get a son from Madhavi in lieu of the remaining 200 horses. Vishwamitra told Galav that instead of taking Madhavi to these other kings he should have brought the lovely princess to him in the first place, who could then have four sons of his own from her instead of the horses! Vishwamitra got his share of pleasure and a brave son and returned Madhavi to Galav who in turn returned her to her father Yayati.

Yayati then took Madhavi to the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna and arranged a 'Swayamwar' ceremony for her to choose her husband. In the ceremony many expectant kings and princes were introduced to her one after another. Madhavi refused them all and went away from the madding crowd to the forest and became a Sanyasini. Later Madhavi and her four sons rescued Yayati who was thrown down from Swarga i.e. heaven for his impertinent behavior. But Madhavi and her four sons on the strength of their own Punya i.e. merit of good deeds bounced him back into heaven.

The story, although a myth, does give us an idea as to how women were treated in that so called glorious ancient past. An innocent young girl and a princess at that, was used like some commodity. She was sexually exploited by four men giving a dam to her feelings. She was put to work like a machine producing brave sons (no daughters). Seeta had to undergo a fire ordeal to prove her chastity. But in order to make use of the fecundity of this young princess the patriarchal society decided that she became a virgin after every delivery and immaculate enough to be married to another man. At last she was allowed to decide her future through the Swayamwar when she chose to become a Sanyasini renouncing all the joys of life to escape the menace of the society. Lastly, even after all these ordeals she, along with her four sons is shown to squander all their Punya on hurling an impudent father back into heaven.

Pandita Ramabai: 19th Century's Rebellious Woman

Such a male dominated society as described in the above story thrived and flourished for a long time without any noticeable women's rebellion during the middle ages. A few examples like Ahilyabai Holkar or Rani Lakshmbai of Zashi come to our mind; but theirs were political struggles and no rebellion against the male domination and women's exploitation in the society. Women remained illiterate and quietly suffered their lot within the four walls blaming their 'Praktan' (their own fate decided by their deeds in the earlier births).

In the 19th century, however, a few men like Raja Rammohan Rai took up women's cause. Against this background stands out a brave woman distinctly, dedicated to her mission of emancipating Indian women and inspiring them to overthrow male domination. Analyzing why India could be enslaved she says, *'why we Indians become so listless, weak and submissive? We claim our ancestors were so dazzling, brave, dutiful and stoic. Why, then, the progeny of such illustrious ancestors should reach this despicable state of slavery? The plain answer is that the innocent women of India are made to live in ignorance and slavery and have become listless. Most Indian men think that the women should be totally ignorant because if they acquire knowledge they will hamper our unrestrained freedom and belittle our dignity. So they give religious mandate that will serve their purpose of enslaving women by depriving them of the right to study scriptures and forcing them to accept total mastery of their husbands -the only way open to them to achieve liberation. Our scriptures are full of animus towards women and use such epithets as villainous, scheming, foolhardy, etc. and ban women from participating in any good social activity. They think that, this serves their (man's) purpose but they are, on the contrary, ruining themselves along with their women. How can their decimated, ignorant, listless women produce a progeny worthy of their illustrious ancestors? Can the fallow land where only grass grows give sweet mangoes?'*

This brave woman of the 19th century who pinpoints the root cause of our slavery is none other than Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Born to a Hindu Brahmin priest on 23rd April 1858, Ramabai astounded the learned Pandits of Calcutta (now Kolkata) by her learned talks in fluent Sanskrit. They felicitated her when she was hardly 21 years old. In their citation they mentioned, 'you are the very goddess of learning, Saraswati incarnated come to this earth.' Thus Ramabai became Pandita Ramabai Saraswati.

Ramabai's father was a courageous Hindu Pandit who defied the then prevalent religious ban on educating women depriving them of the right to study Sanskrit language and religious scriptures. He taught his wife and children, especially Ramabai who was extraordinarily intelligent. He was boycotted by the community for this affront and had to lead the life of a hermit, crisscrossing the whole country with his wife and children, living in temples and earning livelihood through preaching and sermons.

Ramabai was very unfortunate and lost her father, mother and her sister Krishnabai, one after another and by 1874 was left with only one younger brother Shrinivas. Even he died in 1880 in Calcutta. Ramabai then married a Bengali pleader, Bipin Bihari Medhavi who too passed away in 1882 leaving behind the young Ramabai, hardly 24 years old with a daughter. While in this dire state, she was invited by Justice Ranade to Pune. There she established the "Arya Mahila Samaj" at Pune and other places in Maharashtra. She also published a book, 'Stree Dharmaneeeti' which earned her enough money to go to England with her daughter. There she worked as a professor of Sanskrit. In the Oriental Conference held in Berlin in 1883, she astonished the participants including Prof. Max Muller with her erudite scholarship.

While in Europe, Pandita Ramabai and her daughter embraced Christianity and became strong believers. In 1888, she went to America, studied *preprimary education*, gave a number of lectures and also published her book, '*Uchchavarneeya Hindu Stree*' (the Elite Hindu Woman) which she dedicated to Dr. Anandibai Joshi, who encouraged by her husband, studied medicine in America in those days, so adverse to women who dared to study.

In 1889 she returned to India and worked for emancipation of India's women. The condition of the innocent child widows disturbed her and woman's education became her life's mission. 'Sharadashram', the institution she founded had only two women to start with. One of them was Anandibai who was to marry Maharshi Karve later. (Maharshi Karve was later decorated with the highest honour of Bharat Ratna.) Pandita Ramabai also founded 'Mukti Mission' and a school for blind girls. Her daughter Manorama was a great help to her in all her endeavours. Ramabai lost even this one thread of hope on 24th July 1921 but her immense faith in god and her mission did not diminish.

Ramabai, in addition to Sanskrit and English, had studied and mastered Greek and Hebrew and a number of Indian languages-Kannada, Tulu, Gujarati, Bengali and Hindi. The huge library at Mukti Mission is a testimony to her vast reading. She translated the bible into Marathi from the original Greek and Hebrew versions. The British Government decorated her with a Gold Medal- 'Kaiser -I- Hind' in 1919. Her real rebellious nature came to the fore during the bitter debate on the '*bill of consent*'. The most formidable orthodox opponent of it was Lokamanya Tilak, who considered the bill to be an assault on Hindutwa and Hindu Religious traditions. Even the moderate Justice Ranade was inclined to agree with this view. Pandita Ramabai alone vehemently maintained that the minimum age of marriage for a girl should be 16 years.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who recognized that the exploitative relation between women and men is closely connected with sexuality. He wanted both men and women to enter into the political and social reconstruction of the nation forgetting the gender difference. Many women responded to Gandhiji's call and entered the civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements proving that they too cherish freedom and are certainly worthy of it. But by then, unfortunately Ramabai, the brave undaunted daughter of India had passed away on 8th April 1922.

20th Century Indian Woman: when a few can begin to side with her

Jamuna was born on 13th of March 1909 to Mathuradas Gokuldas, a wealthy Bhatia Merchant Prince of Bombay. Jamuna had six brothers and no sister. She grew in a cosmopolitan atmosphere and escaped the taboos and inhibitions that were imposed upon girls of those days. She had no formal education but learned English and Music under a private Parsee tutor. At the age of 13, Jamuna was married to Shantikumar, the only son of Narottam Morarjee, another wealthy merchant of Bombay. She now became Sumati Morarjee and the lady of the house as her mother-in-law had passed away earlier. Sumati Morarjee later became famous as the head of the 'Scindia Shipping' company.

Sumati's father-in-law very quickly recognized her talent and encouraged her to participate not only in social but also in his own business activities. She groomed well and was quite ready, at the age of 20, to take over from her father in law in 1929. Early in 1919 Narottam had ventured into national shipping and set up the Scindia Steam Navigation Company when British Ships were in trade giving him a stiff competition and a great resistance to using Indian made bottoms. Sumati and her husband both were partners in the company; but Sumati, in addition was partner in the managing agency also. After Narottam's death, the couple had to take charge of the company but the main task fell on Sumati's shoulders and she started attending to every day affairs of the company.

Running an Indian Shipping Company and also advocating government support to private sector shipping of Indian nationals was a very bold anti-British stand. Gandhiji who was close to this family appreciated her nationalist stand. Sumati was not only adept at running a company efficiently but was also an active supporter of the underground nationalist organization of Achyut Patwardhan, Aruna Asafali and Jayprakash Narayan. She herself had to go underground for a while and stay away from Scindia. Gandhiji warned her about these activities and told her that the prestige of the philosophy of non-violence should not be diminished. Although Sumati was very close to Gandhiji, she was not in awe of him.

By 1946, she again took charge as a director in the Scindia Board. Shipping is a hazardous industry and shipping lines cannot afford to be narrowly national as they have to depend upon foreign ports, cargo and other services. These are formidable factors that compel many to go international. But for Sumati Scidia was a mission. According to her, with a long coastline, large seaborne trade, a significant sea faring population and obvious maritime interests, India has an important maritime personality. It was during Sumati's time in 1940s that the Hindusthan Shipyard at Vishakhapatnam was set up by the Scindia for the construction of Cargo ships. Its first ship *SS Jala Usha* was launched in 1948. Later the Government took over the shipyard and also many other private docks.

The two decades 1949-1969 were called Sumati's decades. The growth in tonnage showed a big jump from 169,000 to 400,000. Narottam and Sumati had struggled long to free Indian shipping from British control. Theirs was a *National Enterprise* and not just a commercial one. They were proud of it because it induced our people to travel abroad, see other lands and meet foreigners who in turn could come to India and meet Indian people. It was hard for them to come to terms with government takeover of this private enterprise and yet they were the first, in 1957, to give up the managing agency system.

By now, government of India with their policy of central planning and widening public sector, was directly undertaking commercial activity which the business houses were naturally opposed to. Sumati, however, took a very mature stand and decided not to adopt a confrontational approach, because, she thought, after all the Government's objective too was the same as hers, i.e. National Development.

Scindia had established INSOA- the Indian National Steamship Owners' Association long back in 1930. Sumati was elected its president in 1956, 57, 58 and again in 1965 because of her deep understanding of commercial issues, style of presenting them and capacity to organize support. INSOA forced the British to take note of India's aspirations and got support and preference from the post independence government too. However, when the wealth tax bill was introduced, she had to lead a delegation of INSOA to oppose it. She argued that the tax would harm the industries'

ability to compete internationally, i.e. asking for a level playing field in the modern parlance and did succeed against governments' efforts to raise resources. Similarly she attacked the proposed Merchant Shipping Bill allowing anyone even a non-Indian to own and register a ship in India as an Indian Ship. She pointed out the dangers involved in this policy and the Swadeshi Sentiment helped her win this time too.

Sumati's work style was very orderly and well organized; she never kept any correspondence pending. Despite heavy demands of her profession, she meticulously fulfilled her household responsibilities and social obligations. She contributed articles and radio talks of shipping related subjects. Being interested and also knowledgeable in arts and crafts she wrote on Indian textiles and Indian arts and had a large collection of artifacts, fine china and paintings from all over the world. She seems to have developed the techniques of time management and stress management maintaining a beaming cheerful face, well before these concepts caught the imagination of management Gurus. She had a place for everything in her brain, put everything in its place and could retrieve it effortlessly as soon as required.

All these achievements were made possible because of the encouragement of her father, her father in law and Gandhiji. She has set up a new role model for women to show the world what a woman without any formal education can achieve when a few men are on her side. (Ref. 'Swadeshi Shipping' from *"A Business of Her Own"* by Anuradha K. Rajivan. Indian Woman Today)

Indian women now are trying to make progress in their own lives as well as that of the whole country. Wherever they have an opportunity to study, they seem to do much better than the men. Like Sumati, although not as efficiently as she did, they try to fulfill their responsibilities on all fronts and tide over difficult times courageously. They have shown that they are equal to men, if not superior, in all walks of life. Kiran Bedi, Vandana Shiva, Kalpana Chawala, Mahadevi Verma, Sindhutai Sakpal, P.T.Usha, Saniya Mirza, Siena Nehwal.... the list can be extended ad infinitum. Even the women from middle class and poor families are making their mark on the social screen. But only a few men, liberal at heart, who accept gender equality, actively promote women's emancipation from the wretched social conditions and blind faith in which they are still mired. The rest of the men feel hurt when women prove to be their equals. The result is eve teasing, assaults on women, rapes, honour killing, driving women to commit suicide, harassment in the family and physical, economic, sexual, psychological exploitation. These crimes are so rampant that women are scared of their own success and freedom which becomes the cause for their victimization. The educational, social, political, administrative, economic, law enforcement and legal systems are all made and administered by men and will not be able to do justice to women till an overall reform along with a change in the mind set of both men and women is brought about.

Suman Oak

Einstein quotes...

I have found no better expression than "religious" for confidence in the rational nature of reality as it is accessible to human reason. Wherever this feeling is absent, science degenerates into uninspired empiricism. ... I cannot accept your opinion concerning science and ethics or the determination of aims. What we call science has the sole purpose of determining what *is*. The determining of what *ought to be* is unrelated to it and cannot be accomplished methodically. Science can only arrange ethical propositions logically and furnish the means for the realization of ethical aims, but the determination of aims is beyond its scope. At least that is the way I see it.

On Astrology

Astrology as an enemy of truth.

"We should take astrology seriously. No, I don't mean we should believe in it. I am talking about fighting it seriously instead of humouring it as a piece of harmless fun."

"There's this thing called being so open-minded your brains drop out."

"Note, accordingly, how little it means to say something like 'Uranus moves into Aquarius'. Aquarius is a miscellaneous set of stars all at different distances from us, which have no connection with each other except that they constitute a (meaningless) pattern when seen from a certain (not particularly special) place in the galaxy (here). A constellation is not an entity at all, not the kind of thing that Uranus, or anything else, can sensibly be said to 'move into'."

*"The shape of a constellation, moreover, is ephemeral. A million years ago our *Homo erectus* ancestors gazed out nightly at a set of very different constellations. A million years hence, our descendants will see yet other shapes in the sky, and their astrologer (if our species has not grown up and sent them packing long since) will be fabricating their oracles on the basis of a different zodiac."*

"Scientific truth is too beautiful to be sacrificed for the sake of light entertainment or money. Astrology is an aesthetic affront. It cheapens astronomy, like using Beethoven for commercial jingles."

On 27 December, 1997, one of Britain's largest circulation national newspapers, the *Daily Mail*, devoted its main front-page story to astrology under the banner headline "1998: The Dawn of Aquarius". One feels almost grateful when the article goes on to concede that the Hale Bopp comet was not the *direct* cause of Princess Diana's death. The paper's highly paid astrologer tells us that 'slow-moving, powerful Neptune' is about to join 'forces' with the equally powerful Uranus as it moves into Aquarius. This will have dramatic consequences:

... the Sun is rising. And the comet has come to remind us that this Sun is not a physical sun but a spiritual, psychic, inner sun. It does not, therefore, have to obey the law of gravity. It can come over the horizon more swiftly if enough people rise to greet and encourage it. And it can dispel the darkness the moment it appears.

How can people find this meaningless pap appealing, especially in the face of the real universe as revealed by astronomy? On a moonless night when 'the stars look very cold about the sky', and the only clouds to be seen are the glowing smudges of the Milky Way, go out to a place far from street light pollution, lie on the grass and gaze up at the sky. Superficially you notice constellations, but a constellation's pattern means no more than a patch of damp on the bathroom ceiling. Note, accordingly, how little it means to say something like 'Neptune moves into Aquarius'. Aquarius is a miscellaneous set of stars all at different distances from us which are unconnected with each other except that they constitute a (meaningless) pattern when seen from a certain (not particularly special) place in the galaxy (here). A constellation is not an entity at all, and so not the kind of thing that Neptune, or anything else, can sensibly be said to 'move into'. The shape of a constellation, moreover, is ephemeral. A million years ago our *Homo erectus* ancestors gazed out nightly (no light pollution then, unless it came from that species' brilliant innovation, the camp fire) at a set of very different constellations.

A million years hence, our descendants will see yet other shapes in the sky and we already know exactly how these will look. This is the sort of detailed prediction that astronomers, but not astrologers, can make. And - again by contrast with astrological predictions - it will be correct. Because of light's finite speed, when you look at the great galaxy in

Andromeda you are seeing it as it was 2.3 million years ago and *Australopithecus* stalked the high veldt. You are looking back in time. Shift your eyes a few degrees to the nearest bright star in the constellation of Andromeda and you see Mirach, but much more recently, as it was when Wall Street crashed. The sun, when you witness its colour and shape, is only eight minutes ago. But point a large telescope at the Sombrero galaxy and you behold a trillion suns as they were when your tailed ancestors peered shyly through the canopy and India collided with Asia to raise the Himalayas. A collision on a larger scale, between two galaxies in Stephan's Quintet, is shown to us at a time when on earth dinosaurs were dawning and the trilobites fresh dead. Name any event in history and you will find a star out there whose light gives you a glimpse of something happening during the year of that event. Provided you are not a very young child, somewhere up in the night sky you can find your personal birth star. Its light is a thermonuclear glow that heralds the year of your birth. Indeed, you can find quite a few such stars (about 40 if you are 40; about 70 if you are 50; about 175 if you are 80 years old). When you look at one of your birth year stars, your telescope is a time machine letting you witness thermonuclear events that are actually taking place during the year you were born. A pleasing conceit, but that is all. Your birth star will not deign to tell anything about your personality, your future or your sexual compatibilities. The stars have larger agendas in which the preoccupations of human pettiness do not figure. Your birth star, of course, is yours for only this year. Next year you must look to the surface of a larger sphere one light year more distant.

Think of this expanding sphere as a radius of good news, the news of your birth broadcast steadily outwards. In the Einsteinian universe in which most physicists now think we live, nothing can in principle travel faster than light. So, if you are 50 years old, you have a personal news bubble of 50 light years' radius. Within that sphere (of a little more than a thousand stars) it is in principle possible (although obviously not in practice) for news of your existence to have permeated.

Outside that sphere you might as well not exist; in an Einsteinian sense you do not exist. Older people have larger existence spheres than younger people, but nobody's existence extends to more than a tiny fraction of the universe. The birth of Jesus may seem an ancient and momentous event to us as we reach his second millenary. But the news is so recent on this scale that, even in the most ideal circumstances, it could in principle have been proclaimed to less than one 200 million millionth of the stars in the universe. Many, if not most, of the stars out there will be orbited by planets. The numbers are so vast that probably some of them have life forms, some have evolved intelligence and technology. Yet the distances and times that separate us are so great that thousands of life forms could independently evolve and go extinct without it being possible for any to know of the existence of any other.

In order to make my calculations about numbers of birth stars, I assumed that the stars are spaced, on average, about 7.6 light years apart. This is approximately true of our local region of the Milky Way galaxy. It seems an astonishingly low density (about 440 cubic light years per star), but it is actually high by comparison with the density of stars in the universe as a whole, where space lies empty between the galaxies. Isaac Asimov has a dramatic illustration: it is as if all the matter of the universe were a single grain of sand, set in the middle of an empty room 20 miles long, 20 miles wide and 20 miles high. Yet, at the same time, it is as if that single grain of sand were pulverized into a thousand million million million fragments, for that is approximately the number of stars in the universe. These are some of the sobering facts of astronomy, and you can see that they are beautiful.

Astrology, by comparison, is an aesthetic affront. Its pre-Copernican dabbings demean and cheapen astronomy, like using Beethoven for commercial jingles. It is also an insult to the science of psychology and the richness of human personality. I am talking about the facile and potentially damaging way in which astrologers divide humans into 12 categories. Scorpios are cheerful, outgoing types, while Leos, with their methodical personalities, go well with Libras (or whatever it is). My wife Lalla Ward recalls an occasion when an American starlet approached the director of the film they were both working on with a "Gee, Mr Preminger, what sign are you?" and received the immortal rebuff, in a thick Austrian accent, "I am a Do Not Disturb sign." Personality is a real phenomenon and psychologists have had some success in developing mathematical models to handle its variation in many dimensions. The initially large number

of dimensions can be mathematically collapsed into fewer dimensions with measurable, and for some purposes conscionable, loss in predictive power. These fewer derived dimensions sometimes correspond to the dimensions that we intuitively think we recognize - aggressiveness, obstinacy, affectionateness and so on. Summarizing an individual's personality as a point in multidimensional space is a serviceable approximation whose limitations can be stated. It is a far cry from any mutually exclusive categorization, and certainly far from the preposterous fiction of newspaper astrology's 12 dumpbins. It is based upon genuinely relevant data about people themselves, not their birthdays. The psychologist's multidimensional scaling can be useful in deciding whether a person is suited to a particular career, or a proposed couple to each other. The astrologer's 12 pigeonholes are, if nothing worse, a costly and irrelevant distraction. Moreover, they sit oddly with our current strong taboos, and laws, against discrimination. Newspaper readers are schooled to regard themselves and their friends and colleagues as Scorpios or Libras or one of the other 10 mythic 'signs'. If you think about it for a moment, isn't this a form of discriminatory labeling rather like the cultural stereotypes which many of us nowadays find objectionable? I can imagine a Monty Python sketch in which a newspaper publishes a daily column something like this:

- Germans: It is in your nature to be hard-working and methodical, which should serve you well at work today. In your personal relationships, especially this evening, you will need to curb your natural tendency to obey orders.
- Spaniards: Your Latin hot blood may get the better of you, so beware of doing something you might regret. And lay off the garlic at lunch if you have romantic aspirations in the evening. Chinese: Inscrutability has many advantages, but it may be your undoing today . . .
- British: Your stiff upper lip may serve you well in business dealings, but try to relax and let yourself go in your social life.

And so on through 12 national stereotypes. No doubt the astrology columns are less offensive than this, but we should ask ourselves exactly where the difference lies. Both are guilty of facile discrimination, dividing humanity up into exclusive groups based upon no evidence. Even if there were evidence of some slight statistical effects, both kinds of discrimination encourage prejudiced handling of people as types rather than as individuals. You can already see advertisements in lonely hearts columns that include phrases like 'No Scorpios' or 'Tauruses need not apply'. Of course this is not as bad as the infamous 'No blacks' or 'No Irish' notices, because astrological prejudice doesn't consistently pick on some star signs more than others, but the principle of discriminatory stereotyping - as opposed to accepting people as individuals - remains. There could even be sad human consequences. The whole point of advertising in lonely hearts columns is to increase the catchment area for meeting sexual partners (and indeed the circle provided by the workplace and by friends of friends is often meagre and needs enriching). Lonely people, whose life might be transformed by a longed-for compatible friendship, are encouraged to throw away wantonly and pointlessly up to eleven twelfths of the available population. There are some vulnerable people out there and they should be pitied, not deliberately misled. On an apocryphal occasion a few years ago, a newspaper hack who had drawn the short straw and been told to make up the day's astrological advice relieved his boredom by writing under one star sign the following portentous lines: 'All the sorrows of yesteryear are as nothing compared to what will befall you today.' He was fired after the switchboard was jammed with panicstricken readers, pathetic testimony to the simple trust people can place in astrology. In addition to anti-discrimination legislation, we have laws designed to protect us from manufacturers making false claims for their products. The law is not invoked in defence of simple truth about the natural world. If it were, astrologers would provide as good a test case as could be desired. They make claims to forecast the future and divine personal foibles, and they take payment for this, as well as for professional advice to individuals on important decisions. A pharmaceuticals manufacturer who marketed a birth control pill that had not the slightest demonstrable effect upon fertility would be prosecuted under the Trade Descriptions Act, and sued by customers who found themselves pregnant. Once again it feels like overreaction, but I cannot actually work out why professional astrologers are not arrested for fraud as well as for incitement to discrimination.

The London *Daily Telegraph* of 18 November, 1997 reported that a self-styled exorcist who had persuaded bad luck on her'. In order to exorcise her, he explained, he needed to anoint her all over with special oils. She agreed to take all her clothes off for this purpose. Finally, she copulated with the man when he told her that this was necessary 'to get rid of the spirits'. Now, it seems to me that society cannot have it both ways. If it was right to jail this man for exploiting a gullible young woman (she was above the legal age of consent), why do we not similarly prosecute astrologers who take money off equally gullible people; or 'psychic' diviners who con oil companies into parting with shareholders' money for expensive 'consultations' on where to drill? Conversely, if it be protested that fools should be free to hand over their money to charlatans if they choose, why shouldn't the sexual 'exorcist' claim a similar defence, invoking the young woman's freedom to give her body for the sake of a ritual ceremony in which, at the time, she genuinely believed? There is no known physical mechanism whereby the position of distant heavenly bodies at the moment of your birth could exert any causal influence on your nature or your destiny. This does not rule out the possibility of some unknown physical influence. But we need bother to think about such a physical influence only if somebody can produce any evidence that the movements of planets against the backdrop of constellations actually has the slightest influence on human affairs. No such evidence has ever stood up to proper investigation. The vast majority of scientific studies of astrology have yielded no positive results whatever. A (very) few studies have suggested (weakly) a statistical correlation between star 'sign' and character. These few positive results turned out to have an interesting explanation. Many people are so well versed in star sign lore that they know which characteristics are expected of them. They then have a small tendency to live up to these expectations - not much, but enough to produce the very slight statistical effects observed. A minimal test that any reputable method of diagnosis or divining ought to pass is that of reliability. This is not a test of whether it actually works, merely a test of whether different practitioners confronted with the same evidence (or the same practitioner confronted with the same evidence twice) agree. Although I don't think astrology works, I really would have expected high reliability scores in this sense of self-consistency. Different astrologers, after all, presumably have access to the same books. Even if their verdicts are wrong, you'd think their methods would be systematic enough at least to agree in producing the same wrong verdicts! Alas, as shown in a study by G. Dean and colleagues, they don't even achieve this minimal and easy benchmark.

For comparison, when different assessors judged people on their performance in structured interviews, the correlation coefficient was greater than 0.8 (a correlation coefficient of 1.0 would represent perfect agreement, -1.0 would represent perfect disagreement, 0.0 would represent complete randomness or lack of association; 0.8 is pretty good). Against this, in the same study, the reliability coefficient for astrology was a pitiable 0.1, comparable to the figure for palmistry (0.11), and indicating near total randomness. However wrong astrologers may be, you'd think that they would have got their act together to the extent of at least being consistent. Apparently not. Graphology (handwriting analysis) and Rorschach (inkblot) analyses aren't much better. The job of astrologer requires so little training or skill that it is often handed out to any junior reporter with time on his hands. The journalist Jan Moir relates in the *Guardian* on 6 October, 1994 that, 'My very first job in journalism was writing horoscopes for a stable of women's magazines. It was the office task always given to the newest recruit because it was so stupid and so easy that even a wet-eared geek like me could do it.' Similarly, when he was a young man the conjuror and rationalist James Randi took a job, under the pseudonym Zo-ran, as astrologer on a Montreal news paper. Randi's method of working was to take old astrology magazines, cut out their forecasts with scissors, stir them around in a hat, paste them at random under the 12 'signs', then publish them as his own 'forecasts'. He describes how he overheard a pair of office workers in their lunch break in a cafe eagerly scanning 'Zo-ran's' column in the paper.

They squealed with delight on seeing their future so well laid out, and in response to my query said that Zo-ran had been 'right smack on' last week. I did not identify myself as Zo-ran . . . Reaction in the mail to the column had been quite interesting, too, and sufficient for me to decide that many people will accept and rationalize almost any pronouncement made by someone they believe to be an authority with mystic powers. At this point, Zo-ran hung up his scissors, put away the paste pot, and went out of business. Flim-Flam (1992)

There is evidence from questionnaire research that many people who read daily horoscopes don't really believe them. They state that they read them only as 'entertainment' (their taste in what constitutes entertaining fiction is evidently different from mine). But significant numbers of people really do believe and act upon them including, according to alarming and apparently authentic reports, Ronald Reagan during his time as president. Why is anybody impressed by horoscopes?

First, the forecasts, or character-readings, are so bland, vague and general that they fit almost anybody and any circumstance. People normally read only their own horoscope in the newspaper. If they forced themselves to read the other 11 they'd be far less impressed with the accuracy of their own. Second, people remember the hits and overlook the misses. If there is one sentence in a paragraph-long horoscope which seems to strike home, you notice that particular sentence while your eye skims unseeingly over all the other sentences.

Even if people do notice a strikingly wrong forecast, it is quite likely to be chalked up as an interesting exception or anomaly rather than as an indication that the whole thing might be baloney. Thus David Bellamy, a popular television scientist (and genuine conservationist hero), confided in *Radio Times* (that once-respected organ of the BBC) that he has the 'Capricorn caution' over certain things, but mostly he puts his head down and charges like a real goat. Isn't that interesting? Well, I do declare, it just bears out what I always say: it's the exception that proves the rule! Bellamy himself presumably knew better, and was just going along with the common tendency among educated people to indulge astrology as a bit of harmless entertainment. I doubt if it is harmless, and I wonder whether people who describe it as entertaining have ever actually been entertained by it. a gullible teenage girl to have sex with him on the pretext of driving evil spirits from her body had been jailed for 18 months the day before. The man had shown the young woman some books on palmistry and magic, then told her that she was 'jinxed: someone had put.

Richard Dawkins

Courtesy: Unweaving the Rainbows (1997)

Einstein quotes....

- When considering the actual living conditions of present day civilised humanity from the standpoint of even the most elementary religious commands, one is bound to experience a feeling of deep and painful disappointment at what one sees. For while religion prescribes brotherly love in the relations among the individuals and groups, the actual spectacle more resembles a battlefield than an orchestra. Everywhere, in economic as well as in political life, the guiding principle is one of ruthless striving for success at the expense of one's fellow men. This competitive spirit prevails even in the school and, destroying all feelings of human fraternity and cooperation, conceives of achievement not as derived from the love for productive and thoughtful work, but as springing from personal ambition and fear of rejection.
- There are pessimists who hold that such a state of affairs is necessarily inherent in human nature; it is those who propound such views that are the enemies of true religion, for they imply thereby that the religious teachings are utopian ideals and are unsuited to afford guidance in human affairs.

Fraudulent Use of Obsolete Vaastushastra

As highlighted in the Forward written by Prof. R. V. Kolhatkar, Ex Director of Institute of Architecture and Design, Hyderabad, if one goes to any bookstall on airport, railway station or even remotely located town bus stand, there will be number attractively printed and colored books praising Vaastushastra displayed prominently in the showcase. And of course, there are customers who are ready to pay the fancy prices to buy them. But you may not find a single book challenging and exposing the myths built around Vaastushastra. Perhaps this so called Shastra is built upon endless untruths and it may be very difficult to expose all the untruths. However *Searching For The Sun In Candle Light...* written by Arvind Pakhle is one book which attempts to expose the frauds and falsehoods of the Vaastushastra. In fact this book is a 'collage' of extracts from many articles, books, conversations and discourses. Since the author is a practicing builder and developer of real estate in and around Pune, he has collected wisdom of truths about Vaastushastra during his professional career and has brought out them in the book form to help the frightening and gullible common people.

It is quite surprising that no one had heard this ancient wisdom on architecture till 1980's and it suddenly appeared on the stage and caught fancy of middle class and rich class as though it is one time remedy for all the problems associated with fast moving life in recent years. One cannot forget that the progress of the society was not at all hampered in those 2000 years earlier to recent fad of Vaastushastra. In fact one can boldly say that it appears that when Vaastushastra was not practiced then only the society made lot of progress and brought happiness and worldly comforts to the individual and society.

Author has tried to trace the historical background of Vaastushastra. According to him the cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro evolved around 2300 BC were well planned. However, all this huge evidence of progress made in housing and town planning by the old culture was devoid of any mention of Vaastushastra. The Aryan tribes, arriving from the cold grass lands of central Asia entering into Sindhu valley in the northwest India, enslaved the native people and stabilized their own colonies. They needed to establish their superiority over the civilized natives. In this endeavor they invented abstract and mystifying concepts like heaven, hell, Moksha, Mantrashakti, and of course Chaturvarnya – caste system. They believed in Yadnya Veda which appears to be the root of Vaastushastra. Their philosophy was founded on symbolism. Their Vedic culture gave birth to concepts like Shilpshastra, Manasar and Mayamat. Amongst them Shilpshastra narrates the basic principles of Vedic philosophy and might had more influence than other two concepts. The rules mentioned in Shilpshastra might have been propagated orally till recently. Author had listed a few details from Shilpshastra as samples. After going through these details one can conclude that the whole pseudoscience is constructed with the aim of strengthening the system of male dominance and the dominance of the society by the Chaturvarnya giving control to the Brahmins and subjugating the Shudras. The method of developing this so called 'Shastra' is quite strange which includes imaginary stories, imaginary characters like Vaastupurush, the concepts like Vaastumandal and Brahmasthan etc. In fact author had devoted a full chapter on this Brahmasthan and proves beyond doubt how it is impractical and illogical. Everything appears to be fantasy in this so called ancient art of building constructions. In the chapter on Prudence in Vaastushastra, author tries to see the whole scene through the eyes of Vaastu experts and feels that this cannot be science at all.

While commenting on present situation, the author feels that the contemporary Vaastushastra as practiced by the experts selectively uses the dictates of ancient wisdom which are advantageous to them. It has taken features regarding the eight directions, plays with the meanings of Sanskritised names of these directions and how the portion of the house in particular direction is to be utilized. No one can give logical explanations for why people staying in a building, water storage, toilet, veranda etc located in East will face the problems like sterility, death, eye disease, heart problem, paralysis etc; why stair case built in northeast should result in abortion, mental illness or sudden death. According to Vaastu authority northeast is God's direction; as such water tank should be in northeast, slope of the ground and street should be in the northeast. No one can give any logical explanation for these absurd and totally

irrelevant recommendations for house constructions to be built in 21st century or houses built in the last century. In fact author convincingly explains citing examples of two representative layouts of the flats built as per Vaastushastra norms and concludes that it is impossible to build such a house/flat adhering to Vaastushastra criteria. He questions that does it mean that all those who live in the apartments not built as per Vaastushastra are leading a wretched life? Surprisingly these connoisseurs have instant answer for such objections too. As per their argument, every apartment has some features that are approved by this science and as such they are happy. If there is no happiness, then these so called specialists will come forward and bring happiness by restructuring (demolishing!) the whole house (and charging hefty fees!). Whatever may happen they never hesitate to blow their trumpet.

The author even takes issues like shapes of the plots, the slope of the ground, examining the soil, the compound wall, the compound gate, parking arrangements etc in threadbare details in which Vaastushastra experts usually have something to comment and concludes how bizarre it seems to follow the instructions of this so called science. In fact author wonders why the science of erecting the buildings had been linked to philosophy, religion and cosmic energy and why this science interlinks with 9 planets (Navagrahas!), 12 zodiac signs and 27 Nakshatras. However not a single book explains in what way the shape of the plot is related to its being auspicious or inauspicious. It is generally explained in terms of positive and negative energy. The whole trend of thought is simply incomprehensible. In fact shapes of the plots, directions of the roads, slopes of the grounds and even naming the eight directions are all handy work of the people. There is no point in attaching any importance to these aspects as long as they are convenient and masking them as lucky or unlucky. When science of construction was in infant stage there were some empirical tests prescribed to examine the soil on which the house is to be built or slope, shape etc so as to minimize the construction cost as far as possible. But nowadays the construction technology had advanced so much so that it can overcome any issues relating foundation and one can construct building any where or on any soil condition irrespective of its colour or taste which were prime considerations in Vaastushastra. The criteria of Vaastushastra are not at all worth today.

The Vaastu experts even have some opinion about the parking space. The idea of parking space might not have been there at all while Vaastushastra was developed in ancient period. But the experts say that parking should be either in east or northwest or the north of the plot. All these conditions apparently are quite foolish. The parking space is generally determined by the availability of the space and number of vehicles and their reach on the road and not by directions, heights and slopes.

In spite of all these absurdities the people still fall prey to Vaastu experts. Probably the experts' aggressive marketing may be influencing their decisions or customers' predicaments. The talk of death of one's child, loss of wealth, incurable disease, being lost in debts, theft, accidents, calamity etc are such terrifying things, usually uttered by Vaastu experts, make listeners to take corrective action to their dwellings and spend the money. If Vaastu experts feel that customers are hesitant to spend the money as per their demand, the new breeds of Vaastu experts have solutions even for this too. There will be some compromised solution and thus expert will extract money up to the last rupee. Nowadays they combine Vaastushastra of Indian origin with Feng Shui of China and suggest some methodologies to balance the 'energy'. For compensating the energy, they may suggest to place the tortoise (black!) a symbol of safety, long life and intellect, some photo frames, chimes etc thus swindling the customers. Earlier it was thought that Vaastushastra and Feng Shui are competing with each other to claim success. But nowadays there is a holistic approach, thanks to globalization of superstitions!

Author had written open letter to the Vaastu experts and narrates his bitter experience of restructuring his own house as per Vaastu dictates to remove Vaastu Doshas. He lists these Doshas and what actions he took to reduce their ill effects. He even performed Navachandi Yagnya, started wearing Pushkaraj stone and a coral and made rings out of them to wear on fingers. But finally nothing good came out of all these. He concludes that these Vaastu professionals exploit the vulnerability and helplessness, the problems and misfortunes, the greed and temptations of gullible people constantly threatening them with dire consequences of not following their recommendations.

There are number of cartoons and quotations interspersed between the pages and are quite interesting. On the back cover of the book author had given the full text of the declaration of scientists on the illusory Vaastushastra which was signed by Dr. Jayant Narlikar. This is also a worth reading material.

Prabhakar Nanawaty

Searching For The Sun In Candle Light....

(Wisdom of Vaastushastra)

Arvind Pralhad Pakhale

(Translated by Ms Suman Oak)

Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti Publication (2006)

Rs 60/- pp 119

Einstein quotes...

- As to science, we may well define it for our purpose as "methodical thinking directed toward finding regulative connections between our sensual experiences".
- While it is true that science, to the extent of its grasp of causative connections, may reach important conclusions as to the compatibility and incompatibility of goals and evaluations, the independent and fundamental definitions regarding goals and values remain beyond science's reach.
- Religion is concerned with man's attitude towards nature at large, with the establishing of ideals for the individual and communal life, and with human mutual relationship. These ideals religion attempts to attain by exerting an educational influence on tradition and through the development and promulgation of certain easily accessible thoughts and narratives (epics and myths) which are apt to influence evaluation and action along the lines of accepted ideals.
- Suspicion against every kind of authority grew out of this experience, a skeptical attitude towards the convictions which were alive in any specific social environment—an attitude which has never again left me, e

Atheist F A Q

- *Why do you not believe in God?*
There is no credible evidence, just like there is no evidence for Gods you don't believe in Thor, Zeus, the Flying Spaghetti Monster, etc.
- *Where do your morals come from?*
A combination of life experience, family, human nature and the good sense to treat others the way I would like to be treated.
- *What is the meaning of life?*
There is no ultimate meaning to life. However, since we're here, we can give our own life meaning through our words and actions.
- *Is atheism a religion?*
No, it does not require faith or belief. It can become dogma for some people, but it's *not* a religion in the same way that bald is *not* a hair color.
- *If you don't pray, what do you do during troubling times?*
When it's possible, I try to take action to fix the situation. If that's not an option, I talk to people I trust and hope that things will get better.
- *Should atheists be trying to convince others to stop believing in God?*
Yes, but not because of spite or to ruin the party. We should be encouraging critical thinking and intellectual honesty everywhere we see faith used as an explanation for believing something.
- *Weren't some of the worst atrocities in the 20th century committed by atheists?*
Some of them, yes (Stalin was one example). But these people did not commit their crimes *because* they were atheists. Rather, the radical political/racist ideologies they held drove them to commit their crimes.
- *How could billions of people be wrong when it comes to belief in God?*
Truth is not subject to popular vote, just like the majority of people were once wrong about the Earth being flat or the center of the universe. Much of the reason people believe in *some* God has to do with their religious upbringing; our beliefs are generally passed down through the generations.
- *Why does the universe exist?*
Just because it exists doesn't mean there's a 'why?' explanation to it. It simply exists, period.
- *How did life originate?*
We don't know for sure yet. But the best current theories involve a self-replicating molecule (which occurred by chance) that eventually evolved to become more complex through the process of natural selection.
- *Is all religion harmful?*
Only in the sense that religious fervor has the potential to become disastrous. By avoiding logic and promoting faith when making our decisions, *anything* can be justified, good or bad. While there are people who can separate religious beliefs from scientific truths and respect for all people, there are many that cannot.

- *What's so bad about religious moderates?*
They teach that faith is a virtue. They use the same reasoning patterns as religious extremists when justifying their beliefs. If faith is all they need to believe, today's moderates could become tomorrow's extremists.
- *Is there anything redeeming about religion?*
Religion can be used as a motivator for good. It can be a source of comfort in times of need. It has the ability to bring people together and unite them. It has been the inspiration for much of our world's beautiful music and architecture. However, all of these redeeming qualities can be found outside of religion as well.
- *What if you're wrong about God (and He does exist)?*
It depends on the nature of the God, but it's hard to imagine a God who would be upset with a person who honestly searched for evidence but found none that was satisfactory.
- *Shouldn't all religious beliefs be respected?*
No. Beliefs, ideas, and principles should all be respected based on their own merit.
- *Are atheists smarter than theists?*
Not necessarily. There are smart people on both sides of the religious spectrum. However, people who can think logically and critically are generally more intelligent than those who cannot. Many atheists fit that bill, as do a number of theists.
- *How do you deal with the historical Jesus if you don't believe in his divinity?*
If he was an actual person (and not an amalgamation of many people), he had some good ideas mixed in with some bad ones. We should be questioning the documents that refer to him, studying how they came to be, and asking ourselves if we would believe the miracles he performed if they happened today.
- *Would the world be better off without any religion?*
Only if people stopped behaving the way they currently do because of religion. Other potentially harmful ideologies could take its place. In a nutshell, though, we will always be better off without blind faith and dogma no matter what form they take.
- *What happens when we die?*
It's not a question we can answer. But from what we do know, our bodies decompose and we live on only through the memories we leave others.

Hemant Mehta

<http://friendlyatheist.com/2007/07/20/keep-them-short-and-sweet/>.

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The Phenomenon of Satya Sai Baba

Pushpa M. Bhargava

As the dust after the death of Satya Sai Baba has largely settled, it is time to evaluate him, his work and its implications, objectively and unemotionally, for there is a good deal to be learnt from his life and death.

His rise to fame from an ordinary, even humble background, was based on (i) his claim that he was the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba ; (ii) his claim that he represented divinity, that is, God himself ; (iii) that, consequently, he had powers that no mortal man had ; (iv) that he could provide succor and mental peace to people who came to him with problems of various kinds ; and (v) that he engaged himself in charitable works like opening hospitals and providing potable water to villagers.

Let us examine his above claims and actions one by one. There is not a shred of evidence of rebirth; the very idea of rebirth goes against all of science. Every claimed case of rebirth that has been investigated has been shown to be fake.

As regards his being a reincarnation of God, the only proof he provided was that of performing miracles or miraculous acts. The fact is that he never performed a miracle. In fact, no miracle has ever been performed by any one. All miracles attributed to religious leaders are inventions of the clergy. An example would be that of Mother Teresa whom I met and who never claimed to have performed a miracle in her lifetime. But for her to be canonized after her death two miracles had to be — and were — invented and attributed to her. Every single act of Sai Baba that was a miracle in the public eye could be performed by ordinary magicians.

My colleague at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology at Hyderabad, Dr. M. W. Pandit, performed them publicly. So did the well-known rationalist, the late Premanand. Invite Dr. Narendra Nayak by sending an e.mail to narenyn@gmail.com and he will come and perform for you every miracle that Sai Baba ever claimed to have performed — be it producing a ring or a Japanese watch or sacred ash from nowhere, or his photograph shedding sacred ash.

As regards the miraculous cures he claimed to have performed, we never heard of his failures. A distant cousin of mine had her young son suffering from an incurable disease. Sai Baba who blessed him said he would be cured. When she went back to him after the child's death, Sai Baba told her that he felt it was best for the child to come to him and that is what he caused to happen; so there was no reason for worry.

The cures that may have been effected were never established to be directly on account of Sai Baba's 'divine' intervention. They were probably natural or psychosomatic, of which numerous examples are known. After all, what do neuro-psychologists or psychiatrists do? That is why he never allowed rationalists like Professor Narasimhaiah, former Vice- Chancellor of Bangalore University, or

Premanand, to come anywhere near him. It is believed that it were his men who actually once beat up Narasimhaiah.

The late Dr. Y. Nayudamma, the former Director-General of CSIR, who died in an Air India crash near Canada years ago, told me of his visit to Sai Baba with a once ardent follower, Dr. S. Bhagavantam, a former Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister. Nayudamma stood in front of Sai Baba with folded hands and most respectfully, requested him to produce a blade of grass between his palms. That would have been a miracle. But, instead, Nayudamma had to leave.

As regards his acts of charity, there are innumerable people in the country who engage in such acts to avoid undue attention focussed on their ill-gotten wealth. Accounting of his enormous wealth has never been transparent. Sai Baba's unusual accomplishment was to recruit such a large number of the rich and the powerful, politicians and bureaucrats, law-makers, law-keepers, and law dispensers, amongst his followers. Perhaps this is more of a reflection on his followers than him! Sai Baba's death was not a national tragedy. The national tragedy was his being given a state funeral, a state of official mourning being declared, and the country's political leaders - cutting across parties, including the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the NAC - spending precious time and resources to have his last darshan, relegating to the background the nation's constitutional commitment to a scientific temper.

Courtesy: Hindu



Bhagwan Satya Sai: Faith Marginalizes Reason

Ram Puniyani

The death of Satya Sai Baba, April 24th 2011, has created a big turmoil, not only amongst his followers but also amongst those who had more mundane things to look after, like law and order, visit of VVIP's to Puthaparthi etc. Bhajans (devotional songs) to mourn his death are being held all over in the country and abroad. A large number of those belonging to the list of 'Who is who' of the political, business world, and all those who matter in the country are already there to death of the God. In addition 'who will inherit his vast empire', created single handedly out of no where, the way he used to 'create' Vibhuti, gold chains etc. from the thin air is another issue haunting those concerned.

Undoubtedly Bhagwan (God) Sai must have been the God man with a very large following and probably largest wealth amongst the leading Godmen. The latter can not be confirmed, as large part of the wealth controlled by those presented as divine beings, is not known for various reasons. Not only that one does not know if any body can dare to think that Lok Pal type auditing of the wealth of these *renunciators* of Worldly goods should also be thought of. Such Godmen do demonstrate that you get

more when you know how to 'renounce' the World, and of course part of the earnings are put as a part of social service, which is made prominently visible part of activities of these men of God.

Bhagwan's life is mired with multiple controversies and there are many a dilemmas in understanding him. He was expert in the tricks of Vibhuti production from air and also production of gold chains as well. Earlier he was also 'producing' HMT watches, but that was stopped soon enough as the watches carry the date of manufacture on them. Many a rationalists confronted him by and replicated his tricks and even took out yatras to demonstrate that there is nothing divine about such tricks. They are but clever maneuvers of hand and even magician of repute P.C. Sarkar also challenged the divine nature of these acts. Interestingly he was challenged to produce things like pumpkin, which he refused to do for obvious reasons.

Notwithstanding that his followers were undeterred and the number of his followers cutting across different spheres of life kept swelling. He had proclaimed that he is reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi. As an aside, the transformation of Shirdi Sai to present level of opulent divinity is a phenomenon in itself as Shirdi Sai had lived a Spartan life under the tree with no material wealth to his credit and currently his idol sits on a Golden throne.

This self proclaimed reincarnation of Shirdi Sai not only must be sitting over one of the wealthiest empires but also went on to proclaim to be a God himself and also prophesied that he will leave this physical body at the age of 96 years. Unfortunately the physical body could not be saved beyond the age of 85 years. Bhagwan who has saved so many lives through divine powers was to be put on ventilators for survival for quite some time and he could not be made to live his prophesy.

The remarkable thing about Bhagwan Sai is that he survived many controversies associated with his life. He was charged with Pedophilia, sexual abuse by various sources but such mundane things could not shake the firm faith of ever expanding tribe of followers at home and abroad. Tom Brooke's book (Avatar of the Night: Hidden Side of Sai Baba) described his own experience. Similarly sexual abuse of young male devotees on the pretext of yogic technique of 'Kundalini raising' also came to light. There was also a case of murder in his living quarters to which Bhagwan himself was a witness, but it was not investigated beyond a point as worldly laws probably don't reach in the realm of spiritual world. The ties of Bhagwan with the one's at the topmost echelons every time ensured that the matters are not pursued, be it the expose' of his tricks or the cases of murder in his living quarters, all were ignored and soon forgotten from public memory.

To be fair to him, Bhagwan Sai is not the first one to proclaim himself as God. There have been the likes of Rajneesh, who for example began his Godly career from Acharya Rajneesh, promoted to Bhagwan Rajneesh and then attained the status of Osho. After the death of Bhagwan all those who matter in the echelons of power are making a beeline to visit his mortal remains. One does not know whether these visits by the state functionaries are official or personal, one does not know whether such distinctions are any longer valid in our country, where the Constitution does permit us to practice and preach our faith at personal level but not at political level. State visits to such events in

official capacity should be a strict no no. Our Constitution does direct us to promote rational thought; but that again remains ignored as all the rationalists like Abraham Kooror or Premanand were totally bypassed by the mainstream power centers and the issues raised by them remained unanswered and unattended to. There are a couple of films questioning Bhagwan's claims and also accusing him of sexual abuse, 'Guru Busters' and 'Secret Swami' are couple of such films.

Some one interestingly remarked that there are two types of politicians who visit the Bhagwan. First are those who are corrupt and want to hide their sin, and second are those who are sincere and work with the first lot. That apart, the impact of such Baba's, has been a major accompaniment of the politics in the name of religion. This is an era, where the waves of faith are trying to drown the boat of reason, with due support from the incompetent boatman, in the form of state power. The tempest of faith is becoming so overwhelmingly powerful that even raising the questions against these God man is becoming difficult, else how does one explain that a person calls himself God, does tricks which magicians can replicate with ease and is able to collect huge wealth, part of which is showcased as the charity work. One also knows that to expose the prevalent blind faith is swimming against the tide.

One also concedes that these are also the times when the existential anxiety of a section of population forces them to resort to some support system. In the decades of 1970s it was LSD, now it is the ever proliferating posse of God men. Sai's prediction about his future reincarnations will be a matter of great interest and curiosity, how the God will resurface and how his followers will recognize and worship his new reincarnation will unfold over a period of time. Meanwhile one hopes that some semblance of reason is brought forth while dealing with the innumerable Godmen, flourishing all around like mushrooms.

■■■

India would have been a better place without Sathya Sai Baba

Sanal Edamaruku

When Sathya Sai Baba died this morning (24 April 2011) at the age of 85 years, he proved once again that miracles and predictions fail. He had predicted at a public gathering at his head quarters in Puttaparthi, in 2000, and repeatedly many times, that he would die at the age of 96 only. And till the last moment, many of his devotees clung to his word and waited for a miracle. May it be an eye opener for the millions of gullible people whom he misguided and deluded.

De mortuis nihil nisi bene, they say, say nothing but good of the dead. But I think Sathya Sai Baba's case qualifies for an exception. Too great is the damage that he did to India. His devastating influence on reason and scientific temper caused huge setback to the country. At a time, when scientific progress led to great social and economic leaps and scientific awakening started spreading all over India, Sathya Sai Baba launched a "counter revolution" of superstition, supported by irresponsible

politicians and other public figures who should have known better. In my judgment, this is his greatest crime. I have succeeded again and again to expose him publicly as a fraud, so did some other rationalists. But due to his political protectors he was never held responsible for his crimes against public reason. Nor was he ever booked for any other crime he was accused of. Numerous cases of alleged sexual abuse and murder are yet to be investigated, not to mention the financial secrets of his empire.

Sathya Sai Baba insisted in all seriousness that he was god, the creator of the universe, and “proved” his divinity with a couple of small “miracles”. As son of a village tantric he was familiar with the hand sleights and tricks of the trade. However, he did not only fascinate poor and uneducated villagers with his fraudulent performances. Over the years, he managed to attract a galaxy of India’s rich and powerful, among them ministers, prime ministers, presidents, chief justices, top industrialists and superstars.

Sathya Sai Baba had a special *modus operandi* that was the key for his astonishing success and the root of his enormous clout. Many of his high society devotees came to serve their own vested interests. Some came to rub shoulders with the prominent. Many joined the club because it was working as a powerful syndicate spreading its tentacles all over the political system. It was a way to the top jobs and a way to get things done. Others were seeking financial support or wanted to get rid of ill-gotten black money: The empire, it is alleged, was based on money laundering, using foreign devotees and branches. In fact, the huge foreign donations to Sai Baba stood in contrast to the comparatively modest number of active foreign devotees and the sometimes quite weak foreign branches, some of them residing in private homes. That is no great surprise, when one considers that Sai Baba did not speak any other language than Telugu and traveled only once in his whole life abroad – to visit his friend Idi Amin in Uganda.

On his 80th birthday, Sai Baba’s supporters announced that he would turn from a miracle man to a philanthropist. That was, after I had demonstrated his miracles so often in TV shows that many kids in the streets could imitate them. That he since spent a part of the great fortunes, swindled out of the gullible, for social development around his ancestral village, is highlighted now to present him as a saint. But as useful and welcome hospitals, schools and drinking water projects for the poor always may be: this kind of alibi-philanthropy is well known even from mafia-bosses. It cannot be weighed against his crimes and the damage he has done to the Indian society.

In December 2005, I wrote a letter to then President Dr. Abdul Kalam, one of Sai Baba’s ardent supporters, which was never answered. I demanded criminal investigations against Sai Baba. If his social development projects are meant to be indulgence to nullify his crimes, this procedure is unprecedented and unacceptable, I wrote. It is a shame for India that well-founded accusations and numerous reputed witnesses against Sai Baba are ignored without any investigation. Do saffron clothes make an offender untouchable for the law? Do we have to tolerate that political protectionism raises its head so boldly, mocking India’s democracy?

Sathya Sai Baba caused great damage to India. His irresponsible political patrons corrupted the political culture of India. Encouraged by the clout of Sathya Sai Baba, a new clan of miracle mongers imitated him. India would have been a better place without Sathya Sai Baba.

■■■

Baba Ramdev: Yogi or Commissar?

Ram Puniyani

Baba Ramdev has been probably most successful of God men of recent times. He claims to have a following of over a billion people. There are an infinite number of people claiming that his yoga therapy and medicines work wonders for their health. Baba in a short span of time has built a multi million empire; his Trust owns series of Ashrams, ayurvedic drug factories, yoga training centers and many such things, in India and abroad. Overall the medicines prescribed-marketed by him are selling like hot cakes. He himself adorns the divine status and his followers also regard him so, a saint, above the worldly matters. His saffron robes are a symbol of renunciation as such. All this is remarkable, good of both the Worlds, as he is not only wearing divine halo but is also presiding over the empire running into hundreds of crores of rupees built in last decade or so and now entering politics too.

In our country where currently rational thought and scientific thinking has been pushed to the back foot, the claims that his methods are scientific go unchallenged by and large. As per him he can cure Cancer, AIDS and what have you. He also states that homosexuality is a disease, something for which he has a yogic cure. Earlier he had a spat with Brinda Karat, on the issue of contents of the medicines, powder of animal bones in the samples from his factories and on the issue of wages for the workers. Baba claiming to base his Yoga on scientific ground angrily dismissed the issues raised by Brinda Karat, and one does not know what happened to the wage issue of the workers of his factory.

There are not many who can dare to raise legitimate question in the public domain about what is science? What is the method of science and whether mere reading and following of scriptures can be called as scientific? The issues related to the role of double blind trials, biochemical analysis, pharmaceutical composition and their side effects cannot be raised, as in doing so one can be easily labeled as anti Hindu-Anti religious deviant. The garb of Holy clothes is the best defense against all the legitimate questions. So what is projected to be working successfully can also be asserted to be a scientific practice. One would expect that the tall claims like curing cancer and AIDS, need to be questioned as many may get misled and loose the precious time which a medical intervention can play in a positive way.

One concedes that there must be some benefits due to things practiced by Baba and the likes of him, but these need to be regulated and peer reviewed to avoid their misuse in the society at large. Science is not a monopoly of anybody and peer review and evaluation is the best regulator for

decisions about medications-practices for society. This is indispensable to avoid the harm, in short term or long term sense. Divinity should not be permitted to protect the real social issues involved.

Lately Baba has been in the news not for divine or yogic reasons, but for the profane issues related to corruption, and his forming a political party which will fight the elections. While the crusade against corruption is welcome as such, one observes that his sayings about corruption are restricted to one political party. This is a partisan view, an attempt to hide the corrupt practices of other political parties and other actors involved in the issue of corruption. He is scathing against Congress on the issue of corruption and is silent about BJP's corruption. He is vocal about something and quiet about the corruption of rich who are equal partners in this social evil. This may indicate that the saffron clothes are being used for the goals of helping the communal party and the rich.

As such corruption has more to do with unbridled power, absence of transparency and lack of social audit on the economic transactions and policies. To link it with few political actors is an attempt to hide those who give the bribes to get their work done. A principled stand will also be to ensure that all the donations coming to the Ahsrams of Baba and his types belong to the category of what is 'accounted money'! Hope Baba has already taken care of this point before starting his campaign against corruption.

Generally the 'divine' people have to be standing for peace and harmony. One recalls that in the wake of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, Baba had exhorted Indian Government to attack Pakistan, and that he will fund the war against Pakistan. One shudders to think of war mongers and that too with those having divine claims leading our political affairs. The current times have been the one where the politics has been wearing the clothes of religious identity. Baba is going one step ahead. He is trying to ride on two horses, the one of spirituality-religion and the other of entrepreneur-politician, at the same time. His association with those who have done politics by abusing religious identity, the communalists, is very clear. That may be the reason as to why he is creating hysteria around corruption by one political party rather than against corruption as a phenomenon related to our socio-political structure.

■ ■ ■

Is Baba Ramdev a Yogi?

Arup Isaacs

Baba Ramdev who contorts his body into difficult positions is looked upon as a Yogi by the media and public. A person who simply has the capacity to twist his body into difficult asanas or postures cannot be called a Yogi when the root meaning of the word signifies an enlightened individual who has united his awakened consciousness with the archetypal consciousnesses of the various manifested cosmic and supracosmic planes and ultimately with their origin the absolute consciousness itself.

Obviously, Ramdev is not a Yogi in this profound spiritual or mystical sense but is a mere body contortionist who has learned these physical poses from the ancient texts related to Hatha Yoga and has some working knowledge of Ayurveda for which he charges exorbitant fees and is besides accused of killing his guru and a close associate, usurping his missing guru's property, hobnobbing with the high and mighty who pour wealth into his coffers, flying on corporate jets, traveling in a convoy of cars, evading taxes and is said to overwork and underpay those who work in his sprawling medicine factories.

While corruption is a major issue in India with nearly every public figure having his share of the national loot, the way out cannot be a substitution of one folly with another flawed model of development whose days are long since over. Though the non-thinking and emotionally charged masses take pride in India's glorious past or in the teachings of their respective religious books that may be of Indian or of Semitic origin, yet the bitter truth of the failure of the prophets and their teachings or practices to lift the world out of wars, sufferings, diseases, poverty, death and deceit still persists and has to be squarely dealt with and acknowledged while newer and more potent solutions as seen in harmonizing useful bits of past knowledge with the present deep insights based on scientific research, global unification trends, sustainable development, eco-sensitivity, population control, respect for life, secularism, democracy and universal education need to be undertaken if the world is to become a better place and reflect the universal principle of unity in diversity.

In this regard, Europe, through its various grand unification moves, cutting-edge technology, stupendous socio-economic progress, scientific temper, dignity of labor and illumined institutions, remains in the vanguard and has shown the way, while the rest of the world especially India still remains rooted in shallow religio-cultural divisions, petty regional squabbles, obscurantist rituals, mind-numbing superstitions, mass illiteracy, grinding poverty, crass imitation, pervasive bigotry, pompous boast, nauseating dirt, loud noise, shocking civic indiscipline, rampant corruption and class and gender biases.

Where Ramdeva concerned, it's apparent that the man's a rank egoist and has retrograde and perverted ideas about how the nation should be run. His ideas on death penalty for proven swindlers and fake godmen, labelling homosexuality a disease, unverified claims of curing serious conditions like AIDS and cancer, doing away with 500 and 1000 denomination currency notes to curb corruption, dilution of the growing status of English as a medium of scientific teaching and research and other suggestions are pathetic and misleading from the logical, experiential and mystical perspectives to say the least.

The mistake most people make when things go wrong is to turn to atavistic models or to hark back to antediluvian legends or myths and seek to infuse the present with those ill-suited and obsolete models while conveniently ignoring the harsh fact that the march of evolution cannot be arrested or modified by introducing old and ill-suited features into the present system that is very different in composition and function when compared to the past.

The present trend is heavily inclined towards global unification as seen in the broad attempts at globalization in all constructive spheres of life and aiding this move is modern technology and a better understanding of the natural laws based on sound reasonings and empirical proofs while religious dogmas, rituals, bigotry and superstitions are having a hard time surviving the sledge hammer blows of reason and scientific advance.

A way out would be to integrate certain meaningful aspects of the past (that need to be identified after serious study and trial) with the constructive evolutionary trends of the present culled from different parts of the globe in an attempt to engineer a magnificent synthesis of knowledge, technology, economy, ecology, wellness, thought, culture and lifestyles.

The bottom line is that neither religious scriptures nor our unscrupulous politicians nor conmen like Ramdev can lift India out of its present unregenerate state as the mess is too divisive and complex for simplistic and ill-conceived solutions put forth by half-baked scriptures and deviant individuals to make a marked difference.



The Risk of Heresy: Why I am not Celebrating with Anna Hazare

Shuddhabrata Sengupta

At the risk of heresy, let me express my profound unease at the crescendo of euphoria surrounding the 'Anna Hazare + Jan Lokpal Bill' phenomenon as it has unfolded on Jantar Mantar in New Delhi and across several hysterical TV over the last few days.

This time around, I have to say that the print media has acted (upto now) with a degree of restraint that I think is commendable. Partly, this has to do with the different natures of the two media. If you have to write even five hundred words about the Jan Lokpal bill, you run out of platitudes against corruption in the first sentence (and who can speak 'for' corruption anyway?) and after that you have to begin thinking about what the bill actually says, and the moment you do that, you cannot but help consider the actual provisions and their implications. On television on the other hand, you never have to speak for more than a sound-byte, (and the anchor can just keep repeating himself or herself, because that is the anchor's job) and the accumulation of pious vox-pop sound bytes 'against corruption' leads to a tsunami of 'sentiment' that brooks no dissent.

Between the last NDA government and the current UPA government, we have probably experienced a continuity of the most intense degree of corruption that this country has ever witnessed. The outcome of the 'Anna Hazare' phenomenon allows the ruling Congress to appear gracious (by bending to Anna Hazare's will) and the BJP to appear pious (by cozing up to the Anna Hazare initiative) and a full spectrum of NGO and 'civil society' worthies to appear, as always, even holier than they already are.

Most importantly, it enables the current ruling elite to have just stage managed its own triumph, by crafting a 'sensitive' response (ably deployed by Kapil Sibal) to a television media conjured popular upsurge. Meanwhile, the electronic media, by and large, have played their part by offering us the masquerade of a 'revolution' – that ends up making the state even more powerful than it was before this so called 'revolution' began. Some people in the corridors of power must be delighted at the smoothness and economy with which all this has been achieved. Hosni Mubarak should have taken a few lessons from the Indian ruling class about how to have your cake and eat it too on Tahrir Square,

We have been here before. Indira Gandhi's early years were full of radical and populist posturing, and the mould that Anna Hazare fills is not necessarily the one that JP occupied (despite the commentary that repeatedly invokes JP). Perhaps we should be reminded of the man who was fondly spoken of as '*Sarkari Sant*' – Vinoba Bhave. Bhave lent his considerable moral stature to the defence of the Internal Emergency (which, of course, dressed itself up in the colour of anti-corruption, anti-black marketeering rhetoric, to neutralize the anti-corruption thrust of the disaffection against Indira Gandhi's regime). And while we are thinking about parallels in other times, let us not forget a parallel in another time and another place. Let us not forget the example of how Mao's helmsmanship of the 'cultural revolution' skilfully orchestrated popular discontent against the ruling dispensation to strengthen the same ruling dispensation in China.

These are early days, but Anna Hazare may finally go down in history as the man who - perhaps against his own instincts and interests – (I am not disputing his moral uprightness here) - sanctified the entire spectrum of Indian politics by offering it the cosmetic cloak of the provisions of the draft Jan Lokpal Bill. The current UPA regime, like the NDA regime before it, has perfected the art of being the designer of its own opposition. The method is brilliant and imaginative. First, preside over profound corruption, then, utilise the public discontent against corruption to create a situation where the ruling dispensation can be seen as the source of the most sympathetic and sensitive response, while doing nothing, simultaneously, to challenge the abuse of power at a structural level.

I have studied the draft Jan Lokpal Bill carefully and I find some of its features are deeply disturbing. I want to take some time to think through why this appears disturbing to me. In the Jan Lokpal bill, Lokpal will become one of the most powerful institutions of state that India has ever known. It will combine in itself the powers of making law, implementing the law, and punishing those who break the law. A Lokpal will be 'deemed a police officer' and can 'While investigating any offence under Prevention of Corruption Act 1988, they shall be competent to investigate any offence under any other law in the same case.'

The appointment of the Lokpal will be done by collegiums consisting of several different kinds of people – Bharat Ratna awardees, Nobel prize winners of Indian origin, Magasaysay award winners, Senior Judges of Supreme and High Courts, The Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, The Comptroller and Auditor General of India, The Chief Election Commissioner, and members of the outgoing Lokpal board and the Chairpersons of both houses of Parliament. It may be

noticed that in this entire body, only one person, the chairperson of the Lok Sabha, is a democratically elected person. No other person on this panel is accountable to the public in any way. As for 'Nobel Prize Winners of Indian Origin' they need not even be Indian citizens. The removal of the Lokpal from office is also not something amenable to a democratic process. Complaints will be investigated by a panel of Supreme Court judges.

This is middle class India's dream of subverting the 'messiness' of democracy come delightfully true. So, now you have to imagine that Lata Mangeshkar (who is a Bharat Ratna), APJ Abul Kalam (Bharat Ratna, ex-President and Nuclear Weapons Hawk) V.S. Naipaul (Who is a Nobel Prize Winner of Indian Origin) and spectrum of the kinds of people who take their morning walks in Lodhi Garden – Supreme Court Judges, Election Commissioners, Comptroller & Auditor Generals, NHRC chiefs and Rajya Sabha chairmen will basically elect the person who will run what may well become the most powerful institution in India.

This is a classic case of privileged elite selecting how it will run its show without any restraint. It sets the precedent for the making of an unaccountable 'council of guardians' something like the institution of the 'Velayat e Faqih' – a self-selected body of clerics – in Iran who act as a super-state body, unrestrained by any democratic norms or procedures. I do not understand what qualifies Lata Mangeshkar and V.S. Naipaul (whose deeply reactionary views are well known) to take decisions about the future of all those who live in India. The setting up of the institution of the Lokpal (as it is envisioned in what is held out as the draft Jan Lokpal Bill) needs to be seen, not as the deepening, but as the profound erosion of democracy.

I respect the sentiment that brings a large number of people out in support of the Jan Lokpal Bill movement. But I do not think there has been enough thought given to the implications of the provisions that it seeks to make into law. In these circumstances, one would have ordinarily expected the media to have played a responsible role by acting as a platform for debate and discussion about the issues, so that we can move, as a society, towards a better and more nuanced law. Instead, the electronic media have killed the possibility of any substantive discussion by creating a spectacle. It is absolutely imperative that this space be reclaimed by those who are genuinely interested in a serious discussion about what corruption represents in our society and in our political culture.

Clearly, there is a popular rage, (and not confined to earnest middle class people alone) about the helplessness that corruption engenders around us. But we have to ask very carefully whether this bill actually addresses the structural issues that cause corruption. In setting up a super-state body, that is almost self selecting and virtually unaccountable, it may in fact laying the foundations of an even more intense concentration of power. And as should be clear to all of us by now, nothing fosters corruption as much as the concentration of unaccountable and unrestrained power.

I am not arguing against the provision of an institution of a Lokpal, or Ombudsman, (and some of the provisions even in this draft bill – such as the provision of protection for whistle-blowers, are indeed commendable) but if we want to take this institution seriously, within a democratic political culture,

we have to ask whether the methods of initiating and concluding the term of office of the Lokpal conforms to democratic norms or not. There are many models of selecting Ombudsmen available across the world, but I have never come across a situation where a country decides that Nobel Prize winners and those awarded with state conferred honours can be entrusted with the task of punishing people. I have also never come across the merging of the roles of investigator, judge and prosecutor within one office being hailed as the triumph of democratic values.

Nothing serves power better than the spectacle of resistance. The last few days have witnessed an unprecedented choreography of the spectacle of a united action. As I type this, I am watching visuals on Times Now, where a crescendo of cheezy 'inspirational' music strings together a montage of flag-waving children speaking in hypnotic unison. This kind of unison scares me. It reminds me of the happy synchronized calisthenics of the kind that totalitarian regimes love to use to produce the figure of their subjects. And all fascist regimes begin by sounding the tocsin of 'cleansing' society of corruption and evil.

When four Bombay page three worthies, Rishi Kapoor, Prithwish Nandy, Anupam Kher, Anil Dharker conduct a shrill inquisition (as they did on the Newshour on Times Now) against two co-panelists, Meenakshi Reddy and Hartosh Singh Ba simply because they were not sounding 'cheerful and celebratory' (Anupam Kher even disapproved of their 'body posture') I begin to get really worried. The day we feel self-conscious and inhibited about expressing even non-verbally, or silently, our disappointment in public about a public issue, is the day when we know that authoritarian values have taken a firm hold on public discourse.

Of course, there are other reasons to get worried. All we need now is for someone, say like Baba Ramdev (one of the worthies behind Anna Hazare's current campaign) to go on a fast on Jantar Mantar in support of some draconian and reactionary measure dear to him, backed by thousands of pious, earnest television supported, *pranayamic* middle class supporters.

Having said this, let's also pause to consider that it's not as if others have not been on hunger strikes before – Ms Sharmila has been force fed for several years now – but I do not see her intransigence being translated into a tele-visually orchestrated campaign against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. The impunity that AFSPA breeds is nothing short of a corruption that eats deep into the culture of democracy, and yet, here, moral courage, and the refusal to eat, does not seem to work.

The current euphoria needs to be seen for what it is – a massive move towards legitimizing a strategy of simple emotional blackmail – a (conveniently reversible) method of suicide bombing in slow motion. There is no use dissenting against a pious worthy on a fast, because any effort to dissent will be immediately read as a callous indifference to his/her 'sacrifice' by the moral-earnestness brigade. Nothing can be more dangerous for democracy. Unrestrained debate and fault-free accountable processes are the only means by which a democratic culture can sustain itself. The force of violence,

whether it is inflicted on others, or on the self, or held out as a performance, can only act coercively. And coercion can never nourish democracy.

Finally, if, as a society, we were serious about combating the political nexus that sustains corruption – we would be thinking seriously about extending the provisions of the Right to Information Act to the areas where it can not currently operate – national security and defence; we would also think seriously about electoral reform – about proportional representation, about smaller constituencies, about strengthening local representative bodies, about the provision of uniform public funding for candidates and about the right to recall elected representatives. These are serious questions. The tragedy that we are facing today is that the legitimate public outrage against corruption is being channeled in a profoundly authoritarian direction that actually succeeds in creating a massive distraction.

In all the noise there has been a lot of talk about cynicism, and anyone who has expressed the faintest doubt has been branded as a cynic. I do not see every expression of doubt in this context as cynicism, though some may be. Instead, I see the fact that those who often cry hoarse about 'democratic values' seem to be turning a blind eye to the authoritarian strains within this draft 'Jan Lokpal Bill' as a clear indication of how powerful the politics of cynicism actually is.

I hope that eventually, once the din subsides, better sense will prevail, and we can all begin to think seriously, un-cynically about what can actually be done to combat the abuse and concentration of power in our society. Allow me to pick and choose my revolutions. I am not celebrating at Jantar Manta tonight. Good night.

■■■

Kawach Television

Shruti Ravindran

"Are people falling ill around you? Does no prospective groom like your daughter? Is your field yielding a poor harvest? Think it's all just written in your fate?" asks a forgotten soap opera matriarch, clad in a saffron sari. As a plaintive flute soundtrack suddenly gives way to clashing thunderous noises, she appears on a split-screen next to a scrawny man leaping over a fire, dangling a live chicken by the wing, and says, "It's the impact of *shaitani taagat* and *kaala jadod*!" But there is a solution, she assures you, as thunder gives way to auspicious chanting. The "solution" is a combo-pack of amulets and charms, the combined efforts of four varieties of godmen, whose beards range from black to the full silvery Tolkien. All yours for a special price: *sirf Rs 2,375!*

If you've ever flipped through general entertainment channels late at night, you're probably familiar with the strange worlds of "spiritual" telemarketing products, inhabited by babas with photoshopped halos, who hawk gemstones in front of montages of slowly spinning planets, and Lakshmis whose palms spill digital gold. You'd also have seen the *Nazar Suraksha Kawach*, the evil eye amulet offered

by all popular teleshopping brands, including *Divyarishi*, AAA, and GTM Teleshopping. The *kawach*, as you'd have seen, is intended to repulse the envious glares of neighbours — depicted dramatically as laser beams that ricochet off the amulet.

Over the past decade, as these twilight zones have proliferated across cable TV channels, Narendra Dabholkar has come to know and deplore these “fraud advertisements”. Based in Satara, Dabholkar, an activist of the *Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti* (ANS), a movement that has denounced “blind faith” for 22 years, wants to get the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to ban them under the Cable and TV Network Act of 1994, for which he and his fellow rationalists in the ANS led a *dharna* at Azad Maidan, Mumbai, earlier this week. “Due to many socio-economic factors, day-to-day life has become insecure,” says Dabholkar, “so people go for *baba-bua-kawach*. This indicates that the psyche of common people has become weak, and these advertisements make it even weaker,” he says.

Dabholkar's legal advisor Nirmalkumar Suryavamshi said he has advised ANS on the preliminary legal foundations of the case, and is in the process of compiling a series of clips of superstitious advertisements to discuss their case before Prasara Bharati next month. Should these clips fail to convince, he'll prepare a petition for the ANS to take to court.

For the moment, most television channels are content with running a scrolling line across these ads, which typically reads, “This is paid advertisement. Viewer discretion is advised”. Despite our efforts, teleshopping brands like AAA, GTM and Telemart did not respond to our emails and phone calls. One company, Home Shop 18, when contacted, emphasised that it was a “home” shopping channel, not a teleshopping company selling dubious unknown brands. When asked about the *yantras* they sold on their website, they pointed out that these were significantly cheaper than those offered by other companies, and that they choose not to draw attention to them on their 24-hour shopping channel.

Teleshopping companies effectively combine the mystical with the methodical, and cleverly deploy a “scientific” lexicon to peddle their products. “Can achieve 100 per cent results”, promises the Maha Dhan Laxmi Yantra, offered by AAA Teleshopping, a device that claims to attract immense wealth for the buyer.

The website goes on to note that the “pack” contains “products which are energised by renowned astrologer (sic) by following a proper procedure”. Add a bit of “blind faith”, and a lot of desperation, and this *yantra* is just as credible as the “Height Increaser”, a pair of blue slippers advertised on the same teleshopping company's website, which it describes as a “magical device” that helps you grow taller without “going for growth hormone injection, limb-lengthening operation or any type of pills”.

S Govardhan, a BSNL employee in Bangalore, had the requisite admixture of faith and desperation a year ago, when he bought a *Dhanalakshmi Yantra* for Rs 3,400 from the Indore-based Telemart Shopping Network, which had run an advertisement on Kasturi, a 24-hour Kannada TV channel,

promising that it could effortlessly attract wealth. He thought it might help him out of the financial trouble he was in — a botched investment attempt a few years earlier had left him with mounting debts. “But no improvement is seen,” he says gloomily. “They are exploiting people’s problems to make money out of them.”

When he tried to return the product, as the advertisement told him he could do if he wasn’t satisfied with it after 15 days, the company refused to give him his money back. “The man who delivered it to me in Bangalore escaped,” says Govardhan bitterly. “He told us to call another branch, and that branch told us to call another branch. It was torture.” The experience has, however, left his fatalism intact. “They’re bluffing, by offering us these yantras. We just buy them for our mental satisfaction,” he says. “But we can’t prevent the *doshas* that we’re born with. We can’t stop these planets’ influence. Their timing and rotation have to complete. Until then, we can’t overcome (our problems). We have to suffer.”

Bal Kishan Soni, the owner of an electronics shop in Jaipur, thinks differently. A year ago, he bought the *Nazar Suraksha Kawach* from GTM Teleshopping for Rs 2,500 after watching an ad for it on a Hindi entertainment channel, thinking it would help improve his business. After 20 days, he concluded that it was useless. “Bilkul kaam ka nahi hai,” he says. “*Bewakoof banane-wale cheez hai*.” Now, whenever the teleshopping ads come on TV, his wife and two children demand that he change the channel.

That’s what Umesh Raul, a computer engineer with an MNC in Mumbai, wishes he’d done when his mother asked him to get a *Hanuman Raksha Kavach* she spotted on a Marathi-language entertainment channel, during an ad break between two soap operas. “They said, basically, that all evil things will not touch you,” he says. But when he paid the company Rs 3,600, what finally got to him was a *Shiv Kavach*, in damaged packaging. “I called the call centre many times, and nobody picked up,” recalls Raul, “until finally, an extra-smart lady came on the line and told me, ‘What happens, god is god only!’ When I insisted that I wanted the Hanuman amulet, and the three gifts which were promised to me in the advertisement, she said I could go collect them from Bhubhaneshwar. We should beware. These companies are not *genuine in the name of god*.”

“*Sirf kaanch ka tukda*”, is how Lokendra Singh Yadav, an insurance salesperson in Gwalior, describes the *Nazar Suraksha Kavach* to be after he bought it a year ago. The advertisements might proclaim it a “*chamatkari upaai*” (miraculous solution) but he’s convinced it is a “*sabse* third-class product”, though he concedes that the advertisements themselves are “psychologically effective”, especially when they promise you a solution to prevent your business from deteriorating. Ask Yadav how his business is going now, and he responds, with a laugh: “*Badiya chal raha hai. Jis din se woh kawach phaink diya, main safal ho raha hoon*.” (It’s doing well. From the day I threw the amulet away, I have been successful.)”



Dr Dabholkar's Interview with Indian Express Staff

I'm fighting against religious practices that are 5,000 years old. I am asking people to rethink. European nations started doing this about 400 years ago, we did after Independence... but still this thought is not encouraged," said Narendra Dabholkar, the founder-president of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti, who was instrumental in fighting the Kolhapur temple tradition which did not allow women to enter the sanctum sanctorum.

"I'm fighting against the tide. In his movement against corruption, Anna Hazare is saying what people want to hear. In my case, it is the other way round. People don't like what I say," explained Dabholkar during an interaction with The Indian Express journalists in Pune. "There are 14 cases against me and the damages of almost Rs 14 crore have been sought. But it's alright. I take it as part of my work. I am able to sleep in peace at night, that is what is more important."

Dabholkar said the important thing is to stop people from being exploited by superstitions and not check whether a miracle exists or not. "The Eradication of Black Magic and Evil and Aghori Practices Act, 2005 will help stop exploitation of a lot of people in villages," he said. "People should start believing a scientific thought process... And while one follows the scientific spirit, he should also be a critic of religion," he said.

Explaining the Bombay High Court decision banning the use of Plaster of Paris while making Ganesh idols, Dabholkar said: "The HC wants only natural colours and material to be used as the other colours are highly toxic and carcinogenic." He explained that the move was aimed at ensuring that drinking water sources are not polluted in any way. "Ideally, the police should be in duty near the place where idols are immersed in water and ask people to put it near the shore and not immerse it. Last year, Panch Ganga in Kolhapur was very polluted; the people put big tubs near the shore and they were carried off in a tractor trolley. The same thing happened in Nasik also... The smart thing to do is to use clay idols and use the same mud for next year or use it in gardens".

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Paranormal Investigations: why you want to believe

Anonymous

For the past 20 years, I have immersed myself in the paranormal - the weird world where people claim they can predict the future, summon spirits and move objects with their minds. I have tested telepaths, spent sleepless nights in haunted castles and even attempted to talk with the dead. Each time the story is the same: the anecdotal evidence appears impressive at first glance, but once the phenomenon is subjected to scientific scrutiny it vanishes into thin air.

So is studying the paranormal a waste of time? Not at all. In the same way that the space programme has yielded technology that has transformed our lives, so exploring supernatural happenings produces remarkable insights into our brains, beliefs and everyday behaviour.

Psychic readings

In the late 1940s, psychologist Bertram Forer asked a group of students to fill out a personality test. A week later he handed each student a description of their personality, apparently based on their scores, and asked them to rate it for accuracy. Virtually every student rated the description as highly accurate.

In fact, every student was given exactly the same description. Forer had simply selected some general statements, such as "you have a need for other people to like and admire you" and "you have a great deal of unused creative potential", from a book of astrological readings and glued them together (*Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol 44, p 118).

Forer's study showed that personality descriptions do not need to be accurate in order to seem accurate. Instead, if you present someone with a statement that can apply to just about anyone, they believe that it is insightful and specific to them, which is of course how astrology and psychic readings work. The discovery of this so-called "Barnum Effect" - named after the showman P. T. Barnum's catchphrase "we've got something for everybody" - led to a revolution in personality testing.

The experiment also helped uncover a fundamental quirk of the brain. Every moment of our waking lives we are bombarded with huge amounts of sensory information which we struggle to make sense of. Our visual system tries to detect objects and faces, and our auditory system works hard to identify sounds and understand conversation. These pattern-detecting processes are so important to our survival that we have evolved to err towards false positives, preferring to "see" nonexistent patterns than miss a genuine one. As a result, our brains have a tendency to perceive meaning in random input. This is why some people believe astrological predictions, see faces on Mars, mistake lenticular clouds for UFOs and hear the voices of the dead in static noise.

Out-of-body experiences

A surprisingly large number of people claim to have had an out-of-body experience at some point in their lives. Research into these strange experiences has revealed a great deal about how your brain decides where "you" are.

Perhaps the best-known study was conducted by Princeton neuroscientists Matthew Botvinick and Jonathan Cohen, and involves a large book, a towel, a rubber hand and two open-minded people.

Person A sits at a table and places their arms on the tabletop. Next, they move their right arm to the right and place the rubber hand where their real one used to be. The book is placed on the table between their arm and the rubber hand, hiding their right arm from view. The towel is used to cover

the space between their arm and the rubber hand. Person B then makes identical stroking motions on both person A's hidden right hand and the rubber hand. After about a minute or so, person A will start to feel that the rubber hand is theirs.

What causes this partial out-of-body experience? Person A's brain feels their hand being stroked, sees the rubber hand being stroked in the same way, concludes that the rubber hand must be theirs and constructs a sense of self that is consistent with this idea.

This effect has been replicated many times and even extended to a full-body version, suggesting that the sense of where you are is not hard-wired into your brain. Instead, it is the result of your brain constantly using information from your senses to come up with a best guess - even if it does mean you think you are floating above your body.

Haunted

People sometimes visit buildings that have a reputation for being haunted, hear creaking floorboards or see the swaying of a curtain, and instantly conclude that they are in the presence of a ghost.

There is a more mundane explanation. In order to protect ourselves from danger, our brains have evolved to be hyper-vigilant to possible threats, including creepy noises and draughts.

According to Justin Barrett at the University of Oxford, ghostly experiences are due to a psychological mechanism that he has dubbed the "hypersensitive agency detection device". He argues that the concept of agency - the ability to decide whether a stimulus such as a creaking floorboard is caused by some hidden and possibly dangerous entity - is so important for survival that the part of the brain responsible for detecting it can go into overdrive. This causes people to see deliberate action in meaningless events, and to assume a presence when there is no visible explanation for events. The same concept helps to explain belief in God, ghosts and other nonexistent entities, says Barrett. Seen in this way, ghosts are not spirits returning from the dead but the price we pay for eternal vigilance.

False prophets

In 1954, psychologist Leon Festinger of the University of Minnesota investigated a cult in Chicago that was convinced that the end of the world was nigh. The leader, Dorothy Martin, prophesied that there would be a great flood on 21 December and that a flying saucer would rescue her and her followers just before disaster occurred.

Festinger had several observers infiltrate the group and record what happened. As the appointed time approached, the members were buoyant and worked hard to spread word of the impending catastrophe. However, when 21 December came and went without any flooding or extraterrestrial visitation, the mood changed.

Did the group suddenly change its beliefs in the face of overwhelming evidence? No. Instead, members concluded that they must have averted the cataclysm by spreading the word.

Festinger's investigation led him to develop the theory of cognitive dissonance. According to this idea, people find it uncomfortable to hold two conflicting beliefs in their head at the same time, and will perform all sorts of mental gymnastics to reconcile the two.

When evidence conflicts with cherished beliefs, most people are happier to explain away even the most compelling data rather than abandon their beliefs. So smokers will question research showing links between their habit and ill health rather than give up, drivers convicted of speeding will convince themselves that the speed limits are too low rather than conclude that they put lives at risk, and politicians will argue for the effectiveness of their policies even when their ideas have obviously failed.

This approach pervades our everyday lives and helps our beliefs emerge unscathed through even the most devastating of evidential attacks.

Pendulum power

For centuries, some people have claimed that they can use pendulums to determine the sex of unborn babies, predict the future and commune with spirits. They can't. As long ago as the 19th century it was known that the pendulum swings because of small unconscious movements known as "ideomotor actions".

In the 1990s, Dan Wegner, a psychologist at Harvard University, decided to use this effect in his work on the "rebound effect". He had conducted several studies in which participants were asked not to imagine a white bear, and to ring a bell each time said bear sprang to mind. The results revealed that asking people not to think of something causes them to do the exact opposite.

Wegner had heard that proponents of the paranormal claimed that a pendulum continued to move even when the person holding it made a special attempt to keep their hands still, and wondered whether the rebound effect might influence ideomotor action as well as thought. To find out, he filmed volunteers as they held a pendulum, telling half of them to make a special effort not to move the pendulum and the others just to hold it as still as possible.

Just as being asked not to think about a white bear resulted in endless bears, so trying not to move the pendulum produced increased swinging. Although there is debate about why the effect emerges, it seems likely that continually checking that you are not swinging the pendulum brings to mind the very behaviour you are trying to avoid, making it more likely that you will unconsciously produce that movement.

This effect occurs in many different settings. Asking golfers not to overshoot a mark makes them more likely to putt the ball too hard. Likewise, eye-tracking experiments have revealed that telling footballers to avoid aiming a penalty into a particular part of the goal resulted in them not being able to keep their eyes off it.

Séances

In 1890, a Mr S. J. Davey announced that he had acquired the gift of mediumship and would be holding seances at his London home. Night after night small groups gathered around the table in his dining room and witnessed various "supernatural" events, such as chalk messages magically appearing on slates and spirits materialising in front of their eyes.

Guests would leave the house convinced that they had made contact with the spirit world. In reality, Davey was a skeptic and a conjuror who used trickery to fake everything.

After each séance, Davey asked his guests to send him a written account of their evening, and was stunned to discover that people frequently misremembered what had happened. Many recalled events in the wrong order, and some even omitted the important ones altogether.

Davey's work constitutes the first demonstration of the unreliability of eyewitness testimony. Despite how it seems, the perceptual system does not work like a video camera, accurately recording every event that happens. The act of perception is cognitively demanding, so your eyes and brain focus a fairly small spotlight of attention on what appears to be the most important thing at that moment. In addition, it creates the illusion that you are constantly seeing far more than this small area, which fools you into believing that you are an accurate observer.

Inspired by Davey's work, researchers have carried out numerous similar studies, often examining the reliability of eyewitness accounts of crimes. These have confirmed that most people are highly confident, but extremely unreliable, witnesses.

Automatic writing

After spending years using Ouija boards to apparently spell out messages from the dead, some 19th-century mediums decided to speed up the process by holding a pencil, entering into a trance and scribbling messages. Harvard psychologist Dan Wegner argues that the mechanism behind this "automatic writing" helps solve one of the most hotly debated issues in science: free will.

Wegner believes that the sense of you as decision-maker is an illusion created by your brain. According to him, your brain makes a decision and then, a split second later, informs the conscious part of your brain what it has done, making you think you are in control. At the same time, it delays the motor signals going to your legs, arms or mouth. As a result, you receive the "I have just made this decision" signal, experience yourself acting in a way that is consistent with that signal, and incorrectly conclude that the conscious you is in the driving seat.

During automatic writing, this mechanism malfunctions, says Wegner. The unconscious part of the brain makes the decision to act and sends the right messages to the appropriate muscles - but fails to send the signals responsible for creating the conscious experience of you making the decision.

If Wegner is correct, then this phenomenon provides a unique and important insight into the fundamental nature of free will. During such episodes the illusion of free will breaks down and we are revealed as the automatons we really are. Seen in this way, automatic writing is not some freak-show oddity, but rather reflects our true nature.

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Woes of Creation: Deepak Chopra

Michael Shermer

On Thursday, March 31, Deepak Chopra and I squared off for a second time in person in a public venue, this time accompanied by the physicist Leonard Mlodinow on my side and Stuart Hameroff on his side (along with other panelists). The question on the table was this:

"Is there an Ultimate Reality?" and if yes, "Can it be accounted for by science such as mathematics, biology and physics?"

My answers: YES and YES

I explained that I am a Materialist and a Monist. I do not believe that there is a body and a soul, there is just a body. There is no brain and mind, just brain. The mind is just a word we use to describe what the brain does. I said, "you know I'm right" (which got a surprising laugh from the audience) because of the evidence from strokes, tumors, brain damage, senility, dementia, and Alzheimer's, all of which kill brain cells, and along with the loss of brain comes the loss of mind. I asked Deepak and Stuart where Aunt Millie's mind goes when her brain slowly disappears from the effects of Alzheimer's disease.

I noted that consciousness is just a word we use to describe our inner thoughts about the workings of the brain, and that our "soul" is just a pattern of information stored in our genes and our brains. Consciousness is just an emergent property of integrated brain modules and patterned firing of neural networks.

By contrast, I believe that Deepak's use of the word "consciousness" is very anthropocentric, once again returning humans to a central place in the cosmos as the "observers" who, in quantum mechanics, brings things into existence. If Deepak is right then the moon doesn't exist unless it is observed, and yet, quoting that great scientist Bill O'Reilly, "times come in, tides go out—never a missed communication—and they would do so whether or not humans, or any other conscious (or unconscious) being existed.

In fact, I said, Deepak's quantum consciousness is not holistic but reductionistic in the extreme. We don't need to go down that far. Quantum mechanics is not needed to explain brain functions: the neuron is the individual unit of thought, the "atom" of mind. I then worked in a little joke I wrote earlier in the day:

Quantum mechanics is spooky and weird.

Consciousness is spooky and weird.

So what? Charlie Sheen is spooky and weird, but we don't need quantum mechanics to explain his behavior. His "tiger blood" theory works just fine.

Haha !!!!

In Deepak's worldview, everything is conscious, which means that there is no way to distinguish between consciousness and unconsciousness, which is how I often feel when I listen to Deepak.

Thought Experiment:

If humans went extinct instead of Neanderthals, how does that effect the universe?

What if the Earth were suddenly demolished by a rogue planet (as in 2012)? Would that mean the end of the universe because observers would disappear?

Are whales, dolphins, gorillas and chimps conscious and therefore integral to the universe?

What can it possibly mean to say that the universe is conscious? If you will pardon the nerd science pun, that is such a vacuous concept!

Before the debate Deepak asked me to read a paper by himself and Menas Kafatos and Rudolph Tanzi published in the *Journal of Cosmology*, entitled: "How Consciousness Becomes the Physical Universe." Deepak asked me to comment on it, which I did in the second half of the debate. I noted that given the prominence of "consciousness" to the central theme of the paper that one might expect it to be defined with semantic precision. Nope. Here is what the authors write:

"We will sidestep any precise definition of consciousness, limiting ourselves for now to *willful actions on the part of the observer*."

What can it possibly mean for the universe to be conscious in the sense of having willful actions? The universe behaves with willful action? The universe is an observer? As well, quantum mechanics only requires an observation of any kind: an electron microscope will do. Is an electron microscope willful? Does an electron microscope take action?

The authors of this paper write:

Werner Heisenberg concluded that the atom "has no immediate and direct physical properties at all." If the universe's basic building block isn't physical, then the same must hold true in some way for the whole. The universe was doing a vanishing act in Heisenberg's day, and it certainly hasn't become more solid since. And Heisenberg again: "The atoms or elementary particles themselves ... form a world of potentialities or possibilities rather than one of things or facts."

No, sorry, these are different levels of analysis. To prove it I challenge Deepak to climb to the top of this building and jump off and see if the ground is a potentiality or a thing!

They also write:

Heisenberg: "What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning." Reality, it seems, shifts according to the observer's conscious intent.

Once again, NO! This would imply that anyone's method of questioning is just as valid as anyone else's, which would mean that the way astrologers question the universe is just as valid as that of astronomers. I concluded by saying that if you want to get a spacecraft to Mars the questions that astronomers ask are absolutely objectively really better than those of astrologers. Q.E.D.!

In Deepak's rebuttal, in discussing quantum mechanics, he actually used the phrase "the womb of creation." Nice. It's that sort of precise language that makes people all gushy and mushy about science. I pressed him for a definition of consciousness, which he gave me as "consciousness is the ground of existence." I replied that this sounded tautological to me: since reality needs consciousness to come into existence, this means that reality = consciousness = existence; or existence = existence. A is A. Very Aristotelian. But what does that really tell us?

In the end I pressed both Deepak and Stuart Hameroff for an answer as to where Aunt Millie's mind goes during the ravages of Alzheimer's disease. Stuart's answer was so rapid fire and jargon laden (something about the collapse of the wave function inside the microtubules in the neurons inside Aunt Millie's brain) that I couldn't quite get an answer, so Deepak clarified it for me later: Aunt Millie's mind is in the matrix. Okay, I asked, how does poor Aunt Millie access the matrix. "We're working on that," was the reply. Okay, fine, and if our memories really are stored somewhere outside of our brains, then that would indeed be one of the greatest discoveries ever made in the history of science: Nobel worthy. But, until that is proven, I remain ... skeptical.

Post Script

I am often asked if I believe that Deepak believes what he says, with an underlying assumption behind the question that Deepak is knowingly selling snake oil and doesn't really believe his public patter. Having gotten to know Deepak over the years I can assure you that he absolutely positively believes what he says, and that while he may make a lot of money in the process of writing books, giving lectures, hosting radio and television shows, and running his various business enterprises (but, hey, that's not exactly something anathema in America), this fact is quite orthogonal to his deeper mission in life: to shift the Western worldview Eastward.

I had never met Stuart Hameroff before, but I liked him as well, sharing a beer after the debate while watching a game and schmoozing about science. Although I do not accept his theory of consciousness (most neuroscientists are skeptical as well), it would be fun to engage him again in a spirited debate over the brain and the mind.

Courtesy: *E Skeptic*



Gopal Ganesh Agarkar: Rationalist, Secularist and Social Reformer

Prabhakar Nanawaty

Gopal Ganesh Agarkar's (1856-95) ideas mark the apex of the secular rationalist trend during renaissance of nineteenth century Maharashtra. Arvind Ganachari's book, *Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, the Secular Rationalist Reformer*, clearly highlights the achievements of a remarkable personality who deeply influenced the national intellectual current.

In one of the essays on Agarkar, Dr Ganachari describes Agarkar's contribution to rationalist thought in following words:

"In the complex movement of renaissance thought in Western India since 1818, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar's ideas marked the apex of the rationalist strand. Agarkar was a serious student of European Enlightenment and was deeply influenced by the Utilitarian and skeptical writings of 18th and 19th century Western thinkers, especially John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, August Comte, Thomas Huxley, John Morley and Edward Gibbon. Indeed, he was not ignorant of Indian classical lore. But it was the Western liberal—rational thought and the secular— scientific world-view that it represented which made intense appeal to his resilient mind. What he recognised was the revolutionary character of the rational principles, which are timeless and universal, as evolved by the Western rationalists."

In this book author makes an in depth study of Agarkar's rationalist ideas in social, political, economic and other related fields that are accurately reflected in his numerous writings, first as the editor of *Kesari* (1881-87) and later as the founder – editor of *Sudharak* (1887-95). Author examines how Agarkar wanted reason and an enlightened conscience to be the sole determinant in regulating human conduct and social behaviour. His rational approach constantly re-examined all social ideas and institutions – whether they served the purpose of social utility and comfort or not. He was among the few contemporaries in whose thought and practice there was no dichotomy. Education, contends the author, not just formal but also informal *Lokashikshan*, holds the key to Agarkar's ideas of human advancement in life. "Education, not just formal but also *Lokshikshan*," Agarkar said, "holds key to advancement in life. He not only preached but followed: "Persuade, argue, cherish virtuous examples; bring up the youth in the habit of right opinion and right motive, shape your social arrangements so as to stimulate the best part of character".

In his forward, the great scholar, Dr. Y.D. Phadke sums up about Agarkar in the following manner:
It is becoming increasingly difficult for individuals who have the courage of conviction to criticize politicians in power and demolish myths which influence the general public. In such an atmosphere it becomes necessary to revive the memory of Agarkar, a solitary rationalist, who fearlessly expressed his dissenting opinions and helped his contemporaries to learn by discussions and arguments.

As a rationalist, secularist, and humanist – you may call anything – this book is a must to know more

about these concepts as well as how a person faced the problems in day-to-day life when he tries to adhere to his principles and convictions. Author has put the efforts to make the book to be understood by any lay man and aptly describes the details of the events occurred during Agarkar's life. The book has been arranged in a very nice manner wherein the first chapter is devoted to what is rationalism, what is reason, what was the situation in the late nineteenth century in Maharashtra. The second chapter is about the life sketch of Agarkar. The third chapter includes details about how Agarkar became rationalist, who influenced him, what books he used to read etc. Agarkar's literary works are described in the next chapter. Agarkar wrote mainly in Marathi. विकारविलसित is a play in Marathi, the translated version of original Shakespeare's play on Hamlet. डोंग्रीच्या तुरुंगातील आमचे एकशे एक दिवस (Our 101 days in Dongri Prison) is a sort of prison diary of Agarkar who spent 101 days in jail along with Lokmanya Tilak who were sentenced for writing the editorial in Kesari daily and had to face a defamation case. The editorials written by Agarkar in Kesari have been compiled and published in two volumes. Agarkar also wrote scholarly books on Marathi grammar analyzing the structure of sentences. विविध विषय संग्रह is collection of Agarkar's miscellaneous writings. He also translated a book from Gujarati to Marathi शेठ माधवदास रघुनाथदास यांचे आत्मलिखित पुनर्विवाह.

According to author, Agarkar's ideas in social, political, economic and the other related fields are accurately reflected in his numerous writings — first as the editor of *Kesari* (1881-1887) and later as the founder-editor of *Sudharak* (1887-1895). Himself an agnostic, he never denied the role that religion played in the certain stage of human development. However, he felt certain that with the growth of science and scientific knowledge, ethics will be separated from religion. He firmly believed in the persuasive power of reason in inducing people to think and overcome blind superstitious faith and to lead a wholesome life on the basis of rationality and equality. He wanted reason and enlightened conscience to be the sole determinant in regulating human conduct and social behaviour. To him, no traditional idea, institution or custom was sacrosanct, and anything that was inimical to human progress had to be cast aside.

The most important chapter in the book appears to be *Critique of Hindu Society and Conception of Social Change* which includes his ideas of social change, the method of reform and social issues. In fact during his brief life he had to confront issues like the age of consent controversy, on liberation of women, caste system, Sharada Sadan controversy, the panchhoda tea episode, Hindu - Muslim riots of 1893-94. Author had taken lots of pains to bring out Agarkar's views by going through the published as well as unpublished papers available. He describes in detail the nature of the issues, the controversies, the people involved, their ulterior motives and how Agarkar tackled these issues. It appears that most of the time Agarkar was victimized by his one time friend, Lokmanya Tilak, who took advantage of sensitive nature of Agarkar.

The next chapter is devoted on religion and morality. Author has summed up Agarkar's views on liberalism, politics and economics in the next few chapters. Author concludes the book by the article 'Saint of Rationalism'. In one of the papers written by the author, he had emphasized that how Agarkar

differed with other contemporary social reformers on the question of ideology, and the method and manner in which the desired reform was to be attained. In his opinion, the word *Sudharana* was not just synonymous to 'social reform' but represented an all round human "progress". He disagreed with other methods of social change, namely, The Mandlik School of Reform—'Reform from within'; the Telang School of Reform—'the line of least resistance'; the Method of Tradition—both Derivative (*vyutpattikar*) as well as Prarthana Samajists; breaking the continuity and forming a new sect; reform through social legislation; and the Method of Revolution. He preferred the Secular Rationalist Method of social change over other methods which he considered as *gaun*. The paper also attempts to spell-out what Agarkar meant by the Secular Rationalist Method. Agarkar firmly believed that social good presupposes a living, changing society; if the society does not keep itself in tune with the modern ideas based on rationality and equality, inevitably the forces of change would sweep away everything and bring about a revolutionary change similar to the French Revolution.

While reading the book, one will always feel that Agarkar or persons like him should have been there in the present time to speak and act fearlessly against irrational behaviour of so called intellectuals, social reformers, politicians and educated elite. Thanks to the author as well publisher to bring out such a thought provoking book!

Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, *The Secular Rationalist Reformer*

Dr. Arvind Ganachari

Popular Prakashan, Pune (2005)

Price: Rs 395, pp 371

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**Prize in the Sky:
The Templeton Foundation rewards "spiritual progress"
but what the heck is that?**

John Horgan

Is there such a thing as a spiritual fact? Finding? Discovery? Something roughly analogous to, say, the discovery of gravity? X-rays? Photosynthesis? The double helix?

This question is brought to mind by the Templeton Prize, which was given last week to the British astrophysicist Martin Rees. John M. Templeton, one of the best stock-pickers in history and a devout Christian, created the prize in 1972 to recognize spiritual achievements, just as the Nobel prizes honor scientific ones.

Templeton gave the Templeton Prize for Progress toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities (its original name) instant cachet by making it bigger than the Nobel Prize; the award now totals one million British pounds, and the ceremony takes place in Buckingham Palace. Early winners

included religious figures such as Mother Teresa, Billy Graham and Charles W. Colson (the Watergate convict turned born-again preacher) but over the past couple of decades most of the winners have been scientists who view science and religion as somehow compatible—or at least not in conflict.

The prize is administered by the Templeton Foundation, which Sir John established in 1987. In addition to overseeing the annual prize, the foundation spends tens of millions of dollars a year to support academic programs, publications, broadcasts, lectures, conferences and research on topics that supposedly have some spiritual component. Sir John died in 2008, and the Templeton Foundation is now run by his son Jack, a Christian and contributor to conservative political causes, including the presidential campaigns of George W. Bush.

Stung by criticism that it has a pro-religion agenda, the foundation has purged most references to religion from its mission statement. It now defines itself as "a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to the 'Big Questions' of human purpose and ultimate reality." But according to an investigation published this year in *Evolutionary Psychology*, the foundation's religious agenda "seems to have remained the same."

What bothers me most about the Templeton Foundation is that it promotes a view of science and religion—or "spirituality," to use the term it favors—as roughly equivalent. Consider this e-mail that Jack Templeton sent me last summer soliciting nominations for the Templeton Prize. He wrote: "The Templeton Prize parallels growing attention to the idea that progress in spiritual information is just as feasible as progress in the sciences." First of all, the Templeton Foundation has artificially created the "growing attention" to which Jack refers with enormous infusions of cash into science and other scholarly fields.

Moreover, the claim that "progress in spiritual information is just as feasible as progress in the sciences" is absurd, because there is no such thing as "spiritual information". To answer the question I posed at the beginning of this post, the notion of a spiritual fact, finding or discovery is an oxymoron. Spiritual claims abound, of course—"God is love," for example—but there isn't a shred of empirical evidence for any of them, certainly nothing resembling the overwhelming evidence compiled for heliocentrism, evolution by natural selection, atomic theory and the genetic code. And if spiritual information doesn't exist, how can there be "progress in spiritual information"?

Some Templeton-funded scholars have tried to drag science down to the level of religion by arguing that science can't produce truth either. I heard this claim in 2005 when I spent three weeks at the University of Cambridge participating in a Templeton fellowship for journalists, which featured talks by scientists and other scholars. In one talk the Christian theologian Nancey Murphy asserted that scientific claims are just as tentative as religious ones, hence scientists such as Richard Dawkins—who was in the audience—have no right to be so condescending to people of faith.

This postmodern tactic is ludicrous, because millennia of theology, Murphy's scholarly discipline, have not generated a single "discovery" (and historical or archaeological findings, such as the discovery of

the Gnostic Gospels, don't count). Some might say—and I might agree—that the New Testament, in which Jesus exhorts us to love our enemies, represents an improvement over the eye-for-an-eye morality of the Old Testament. But replacing nasty religious opinions with benign ones in no way resembles, say, Einstein's improvement on Newton's model of gravity.

The Templeton Foundation itself may realize the futility of its quest to find common ground between science and spirituality. Martin Rees, the recipient of the 2011 Templeton Prize, has helped refine models of the big bang, black holes and other cosmic phenomena as well as proposing how humanity can avoid being destroyed by bioterrorism or some other catastrophe. But he's not religious. He calls himself an "unbelieving Anglican" who goes to church out of "loyalty to his tribe."

From Charles Colson and Billy Graham to an unbelieving astrophysicist? Now that's progress, even if it's not spiritual.

Courtesy: *Scientific American*



Religious Experiences shrink Part of the Brain

Andrew Newberg

The article, "Religious factors and hippocampal atrophy in late life," by Amy Owen and colleagues at Duke University represents an important advance in our growing understanding of the relationship between the brain and religion. The study, published March 30 in PLoS One, showed greater atrophy in the hippocampus in individuals who identify with specific religious groups as well as those with no religious affiliation. It is a surprising result, given that many prior studies have shown religion to have potentially beneficial effects on brain function, anxiety, and depression.

A number of studies have evaluated the acute effects of religious practices, such as meditation and prayer, on the human brain. A smaller number of studies have evaluated the longer term effects of religion on the brain. Such studies, like the present one, have focused on differences in brain volume or brain function in those people heavily engaged in meditation or spiritual practices compared to those who are not. And an even fewer number of studies have explored the longitudinal effects of doing meditation or spiritual practices by evaluating subjects at two different time points.

In this study, Owen et al. used MRI to measure the volume of the hippocampus, a central structure of the limbic system that is involved in emotion as well as in memory formation. They evaluated the MRIs of 268 men and women aged 58 and over, who were originally recruited for the Neuro-Cognitive Outcomes of Depression in the Elderly study, but who also answered several questions regarding their religious beliefs and affiliation. The study by Owen et al. is unique in that it focuses specifically on religious individuals compared to non-religious individuals. This study also broke down these individuals into those who are born again or who have had life-changing religious experiences.

The results showed significantly greater hippocampal atrophy in individuals reporting a life-changing religious experience. In addition, they found significantly greater hippocampal atrophy among born-again Protestants, Catholics, and those with no religious affiliation, compared with Protestants not identifying as born-again.

The authors offer the hypothesis that the greater hippocampal atrophy in selected religious groups might be related to stress. They argue that some individuals in the religious minority, or those who struggle with their beliefs, experience higher levels of stress. This causes a release of stress hormones that are known to depress the volume of the hippocampus over time. This might also explain the fact that both non-religious as well as some religious individuals have smaller hippocampal volumes.

This is an interesting hypothesis. Many studies have shown positive effects of religion and spirituality on mental health, but there are also plenty of examples of negative impacts. There is evidence that members of religious groups who are persecuted or in the minority might have markedly greater stress and anxiety as they try to navigate their own society. Other times, a person might perceive God to be punishing them and therefore have significant stress in the face of their religious struggle. Others experience religious struggle because of conflicting ideas with their religious tradition or their family. Even very positive, life-changing experiences might be difficult to incorporate into the individual's prevailing religious belief system and this can also lead to stress and anxiety. Perceived religious transgressions can cause emotional and psychological anguish. This "religious" and "spiritual pain" can be difficult to distinguish from pure physical pain. And all of these phenomena can have potentially negative effects on the brain.

Thus, Owen and his colleagues certainly pose a plausible hypothesis. They also cite some of the limitations of their findings, such as the small sample size. More importantly, the causal relationship between brain findings and religion is difficult to clearly establish. Is it possible, for example, that those people with smaller hippocampal volumes are more likely to have specific religious attributes, drawing the causal arrow in the other direction? Further, it might be that the factors leading up to the life-changing events are important and not just the experience itself. Since brain atrophy reflects everything that happens to a person up to that point, one cannot definitively conclude that the most intense experience was in fact the thing that resulted in brain atrophy. So there are many potential factors that could lead to the reported results. (It is also somewhat problematic that stress itself did not correlate with hippocampal volumes since this was one of the potential hypotheses proposed by the authors and thus, appears to undercut the conclusions.) One might ask whether it is possible that people who are more religious suffer greater inherent stress, but that their religion actually helps to protect them somewhat. Religion is frequently cited as an important coping mechanism for dealing with stress.

This new study is intriguing and important. It makes us think more about the complexity of the relationship between religion and the brain. This field of scholarship, referred to as neuro-theology,

can greatly advance our understanding of religion, spirituality, and the brain. Continued studies of both the acute and chronic effects of religion on the brain will be highly valuable. For now, we can be certain that religion affects the brain--we just are not certain how.



Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Brahmins

R. A. Jahagirdar

Rakshit Sonawane's account of how Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's son and the so-called followers of Babasaheb treated Dr. Savita Mai makes very sad reading (Indian Express, Friday, 30th May, 2003). The devotion with which Babasaheb's Brahmin wife looked after him in his fading life and health went totally unheeded; worse, even Babasaheb's appreciation of the way she nursed him and cared for him was sought to be erased by his followers.

When Babasaheb's *The Buddha And His Dharma* was posthumously published, it was published without the Preface written by Babasaheb. The Preface which was written on 15th March, 1956 contained touching references to the help he had received from his wife. After the great leader's death, his widow had become *persona non grata* to his followers and the publishers suppressed the Preface and along with it, Babasaheb's expression of his fine feelings for his wife.

All this came to be known only when Bhagwan Das, a Punjabi Buddhist Litterateur included that preface in his *Rare Prefaces* written by Dr. Ambedkar published in 1980. In this Preface Babasaheb had given an account of his early religious expressions, the origin of the book, and the circumstances under which the book came to be written. These points were incorporated by Mr. R. R. Bhole (the then Chairman of People's Education Society) in his Foreword (dated 19th November 1957) to *The Buddha and His Dharma* published first in 1957 but the references made by Babasaheb to his wife Savita were avoided. The non-inclusion of Babasaheb's Preface in the edition of his own book was in fact an insult to his memory. How could a poor summary of Babasaheb's narration be a substitute for the original Preface written by him? Even in a later edition (1974) in the Preface written by Justice R.R. Bhole (he was a Judge of the Bombay High Court at this time) not a word was said about Mai Ambedkar. (Source Ambedkar and Buddhism by Sangharakshita: Windhorse Publications, 1986).

This attitude of Babasaheb's followers is in sharp contrast to Babasaheb's own attitude towards Brahmins. Babasaheb's anti-Brahmnanism did not lead him to hate Brahmins. This can be seen from several facts which I am giving in chronological order.

Let us begin with Babasaheb's surname. The family name of Ambedkars was Sakpal but the family took the surname of Ambawadekar, after the village Ambawade in Ratnagiri District. In a short autobiographical account, Babasaheb has recalled that he had a Brahmin teacher named Ambedkar in his school. Babasaheb affectionately remembers that his teacher used to give a share of his food. This teacher thought that Ambawadekar was a clumsy name and shortened it to Ambedkar which was then put in the school record.

Later when Babasaheb was in the second standard of the High School (present Sixth standard), he had a Brahmin teacher named Pendse whom Babasaheb remembers as an affectionate person. On one rainy day when Babasaheb went to the school completely drenched, Pendse teacher sent him with his own son, to Pendse's house where arrangement for a hot water bath was made.

In Elphinstone High School, Bombay, Babasaheb was asked to write on the blackboard to which some students in the class objected because their tiffin boxes kept behind the blackboard would be defiled. The mathematics teacher told those students that Babasaheb would write on the blackboard and they were free to remove their tiffin boxes. The mathematics teacher was a Brahmin called Joshi (This autobiographical account is included in Bhalchandra Phadke's Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar - 1985, Shri Vidya Prakashan, Pune). When in school Babasaheb used to go to Charni Road Garden (now S.K. Patil Udyan) to study. Krishnaji Arjun Keluskar, the Brahmin Headmaster of Wilson High School, who used to frequent the same garden, noticed the studious boy. Keluskar had pleasant talks with Babasaheb who says that these talks used to set him thinking. In 1907 Babasaheb, being the first Matriculate in the Mahar community, was felicitated in a public meeting where Keluskar was a speaker. Keluskar presented to Babasaheb a book on Buddha written by him in Marathi. Being nothing if not an avid reader, the new matriculate lost no time in devouring the book which contained the sublime story of the Enlightened One. One could be pardoned if one hazards a guess that Keluskar sowed the seeds of conversion in Babasaheb's mind. Keluskar continued to take interest in the untouchable boy and was instrumental in getting financial help from the Maharaja of Baroda for Babasaheb's higher education.

In the well-known Mahad Satyagraha where the Chavdar Lake was "polluted" by the untouchables, Bapurao Joshi, a leading Brahmin citizen of Mahad, was a strong supporter. The caste Hindus wanted to purify the lake, but Bapurao Joshi jumped into the lake before that, challenging the pollution theory.

Sangharakshita (in the book mentioned earlier) has narrated an incident connected with the Mahad Conference. Two prominent non-Brahmin leaders of Maharashtra offered to support Babasaheb in his campaign on the condition that no Brahmins, even the liberal-minded Brahmins sympathetic to the cause of the untouchables, should be allowed to participate in the campaign. Babasaheb flatly rejected the offer by declaring that the view that all Brahmins were enemies of the untouchables was erroneous. What was objectionable was the spirit of Brahminism viz., the idea that some castes were higher than the other. Babasaheb said that a Brahmin free from the spirit of Brahminism was welcome. Not birth, but worth — that was what counted. This in effect was a basic Buddhist principle.

On one occasion Babasaheb was hesitant to fully take this stand. Maha Bodhi Society of which a Bengali Brahmin (not a Buddhist) was the President published a journal which had worldwide readership among the Buddhists. Babasaheb was reluctant to write for that journal because the President of that Society was a Brahmin. However in order to make known his views on Buddhism to the largest possible number of people, he did contribute an article of 6500 words. This was the famous "The Buddha and the Future of His Religion" which appeared in April-May 1950 Special Issue of Maha Bodhi, the official organ of the Society.

When Babasaheb was under a siege while piloting the Hindu Code Bill, which was opposed tooth and nail by the Kayastha President of India, it was two Brahmins — Hridaynath Kunzru and N.V. Gadgil — who made strong speeches in its support in the Lok Sabha. Incidentally it should be noted that Gadgil

had been seriously injured while trying to force entry in a temple at Poona along with the untouchables. However, it must also be mentioned that the Bengali Brahmin, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerji, denounced the Bill as the one which would destroy the Hindu society.

As a rule, a sitting judge of a High Court cannot comment upon a bill pending in the legislature. Casting aside this rule, Justice P.B. Gajendragadkar (of the Bombay High Court) delivered lectures supporting the Hindu Code Bill. Justice P.B. Gajendragadkar's elder brother, Professor Ashwathamacharya Balacharya Gajendragadkar, took premature retirement from his post in Elphinstone College, Bombay, to accept the offer of Babasaheb to become the first Principal of Siddharth College, Bombay, - the first college established by Peoples Education Society. Incidentally, Babasaheb and Prof. Gajendragadkar were classmates in the college and both of them passed the BA examination in the same year i.e. 1912.

Freethinkers born in the so-called high castes are not proud of their birth in those castes, nor are they ashamed of it. They did not choose to be so born. People like us who have chosen to be freethinkers have been highly influenced by rationalism in Babasaheb's writings. Some of Babasaheb's so-called followers today are knocking at the doors of a leader who wanted the Government of Maharashtra to refrain from publishing Babasaheb's books. If Babasaheb was in a grave, he would have undoubtedly turned in it.



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Faith and Foolishness: When Religious Beliefs Become Dangerous

Every two years the National Science Foundation produces a report, *Science and Engineering Indicators*, designed to probe the public's understanding of science concepts. And every two years we relearn the sad fact that U.S. adults are less willing to accept evolution and the big bang as factual than adults in other industrial countries.

Except for this time. Was there suddenly a quantum leap in U.S. science literacy? Sadly, no. Rather the National Science Board, which oversees the foundation, chose to leave the section that discussed these issues out of the 2010 edition, claiming the questions were "flawed indicators of scientific knowledge because responses conflated knowledge and beliefs." In short, if their religious beliefs require respondents to discard scientific facts, the board doesn't think it appropriate to expose that truth.

The section does exist, however, and *Science* magazine obtained it. When presented with the statement "human beings, as we know them today, developed from earlier species of animals," just 45 percent of respondents indicated "true." Compare this figure with the affirmative percentages in Japan (78), Europe (70), China (69) and South Korea (64). Only 33 percent of Americans agreed that "the universe began with a big explosion."

Consider the results of a 2009 Pew Survey: 31 percent of U.S. adults believe "humans and other living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time." (So much for dogs, horses or H1N1 flu.) The survey's most enlightening aspect was its categorization of responses by levels of religious activity, which suggests that the most devout are on average least willing to accept the evidence of reality. White evangelical Protestants have the highest denial rate (55 percent), closely followed by the group across all religions who attend services on average at least once a week (49 percent).

I don't know which is more dangerous, that religious beliefs force some people to choose between knowledge and myth or that pointing out how religion can purvey ignorance is taboo. To do so risks being branded as intolerant of religion. The kindly Dalai Lama, in a recent *New York Times* editorial, juxtaposed the statement that "radical atheists issue blanket condemnations of those who hold religious beliefs" with his censure of the extremist intolerance, murderous actions and religious hatred in the

Middle East. Aside from the distinction between questioning beliefs and beheading or bombing people, the “radical atheists” in question rarely condemn individuals but rather actions and ideas that deserve to be challenged.

Surprisingly, the strongest reticence to speak out often comes from those who should be most worried about silence. Last May I attended a conference on science and public policy at which a representative of the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences gave a keynote address. When I questioned how he reconciled his own reasonable views about science with the sometimes absurd and unjust activities of the Church—from false claims about condoms and AIDS in Africa to pedophilia among the clergy—I was denounced by one speaker after another for my intolerance.

Religious leaders need to be held accountable for their ideas. In my state of Arizona, Sister Margaret McBride, a senior administrator at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Phoenix, recently authorized a legal abortion to save the life of a 27-year-old mother of four who was 11 weeks pregnant and suffering from severe complications of pulmonary hypertension; she made that decision after consultation with the mother’s family, her doctors and the local ethics committee. Yet the bishop of Phoenix, Thomas Olmsted, immediately excommunicated Sister Margaret, saying, “The mother’s life cannot be preferred over the child’s.” Ordinarily, a man who would callously let a woman die and orphan her children would be called a monster; this should not change just because he is a cleric.

In the race for Alabama governor, an advertisement bankrolled by the state teachers’ union attacked candidate Bradley Byrne because he supposedly supported teaching evolution. Byrne, worried about his political future, felt it necessary to deny the charge.

Keeping religion immune from criticism is both unwarranted and dangerous. Unless we are willing to expose religious irrationality whenever it arises, we will encourage irrational public policy and promote ignorance over education for our children.

Lawrence M. Krauss

Courtesy: Scientific American Aug 2010

Healing Camps of Gurav Brothers

Kushire is a small town like any other town in Maharashtra, situated in Panhala Taluka of Kolhapur District. Gurav brothers hail from this place. They once had a dream or may be, Jyotiba (the deity from the nearby famous temple of Jyotiba) revealed himself in a human form before them; and this miracle brought the town in lime light. The story goes: Gurav brother's bullock had become blind. In their dream, they were told to put the juice of the leaves of a certain plant in the bullock's eyes. It is also said that they were told about this medicine by someone from the forest. They used that medicine and to the surprise of everyone, the bullock had its normal vision back. Now Gurav brothers reasoned, there couldn't be much difference between the eyes of a bullock and those of a man. (Which proved right by the huge crowds that gathered in Kushire town.) So the medicine that cured the bullock's blindness should cure that of human beings too. They decided to try it out. They started treating patients and the news spread like wild fire, faster than an epidemic of eye-infection. A crowd of 4-5 thousand people gathered every day in Kushire. Very soon people from faraway districts, even from Karnataka started coming for treatment of eyes. In a short period of just three months, the number of patients being treated rose to over 3 lakhs per month. This service rendered to the blind people looked like missionary work as it cost a patient only one coconut. (The fact that this mission brought the brothers 3 lakhs x 6 ruppes = 18 lakh rupees per month should open the eyes of all superstitious people.) The Kolhapur Municipal Corporation arranged for special bus services on Wednesdays and Sundays, the days of the treatment. The buses displayed boards saying, 'Let us go to Kushire and cure our eyes'. The local news papers, some weeklies and the local cable TV gave excessive publicity to the two brothers. Innumerable rumors were spread as authentic claims of cures like improvement in vision, being able to see without spectacles, etc. The rumors spread around that those who are in the queue for the treatment, just throw away their spectacles because they are sure that once the medicine is put into their eyes they will have no need of them. At the height of publicity, loud claims like 'two drops of medicine make cataract operation redundant'; 'a blind man recovers his vision' etc. were made. In addition it was also made known widely that the

person who revealed the secret of this medicine and then disappeared had warned not to become greedy; for demanding money will result in loss of this knowledge.

I visited one such healing camp. 8-10 thousand people, all from rural area, had arrived there for treatment. The police personnel who had come there to control mischief and maintain order were making people stand in queues. Most of the people were 45 to 50 years old and uneducated. Quite a few women and very old people too were there. All of them appeared to be very poor. Most of the women were anemic, starved of vitamins and especially vitamin A that is essential for eyes. The method of treating the patients was not just strange but atrocious. 10 to 15 persons were made to lie down in a row in one room or in the veranda with their heads on one side. Not a single examination of any kind was made. The medicine was kept in a dirty vessel with a dirtier cloth dipped in it. The cloth wet with medicine was taken out and squeezed and then again squeezed over the eyes of the patient to put two drops in each of his eyes. No one complained about anything because the treatment was quite simple, very cheap and sanctified by its supposedly divine power.

The tremendous response to the treatment is a sign of the prevalence of eye ailments in our society and lack of facilities to treat them. The number of patients was simply astounding. This method of treating eye ailments spread and clinics were opened at 5-6 places in the Kolhapur district. All of them claimed to have inherited the knowledge directly from the Gurav brothers. Simultaneously the brothers announced that they did not have any branch anywhere. It created a tumult that was given publicity by the local news papers. See the news published in Ratnagiri Times of 16th, Sept 1997 from Alore. It says, "Many men, women and elderly people from the nooks and corners of the district have crowded into Alore. When asked why they were treating all ailments with the same medicine when the ophthalmology institutes from Kolhapur and Pune have opposed it, the director of the camp Ashokbhai replied that the question will be answered by the enormity of the crowd. Then he added, the doctors have looted these people several times while the treatment here is free. So the doctors are crying wolf because they will lose their lucrative practice. It is also reported that the patients were made to sign a printed form which said that every patient that comes here takes the treatment at his own responsibility and the attendants who administer the medicine will not be blamed if it is found defective." (A clever ploy indeed.)

The news further added, 'since there was no complain of any dire consequence of the treatment, the opinion of the patients present there was that treatment with this medicine should continue. Many government servants and drivers of various vehicles have done away with their spectacles. Dr. Ketakar, Dr. Pawar, Dr. Patel and Dr. (Mrs) Mane availed of this treatment. More than thousand people take advantage of the treatment on any one day.'

This provided a great opportunity to local social organizations to do something useful for the society. In Math, a town in Lanja Taluka of Ratnagiri District, a youth organization called 'Sanmitra Mandal' invited Gurav Brothers to hold a camp there during their Navaratri Festival. The camp site was crowded with jeeps, tempos, rickshaws, taxis and bikes since early morning. More than 3000 people from nearly 100 nearby villages gathered there. The camp was organized by a senior Shivasena worker Sanjay Chavan. The two political parties, the Congress and the Shivasena are sworn adversaries of each other while the Republican Party abhors Shivasena. But this 'socially useful camp' brought them all together. The senior Congress Leader, Mukundrao Savant inaugurated the camp and the Republican Party Workers helped in its proper management. News papers had publicized that despite all opposition from the organization of medical practitioners of Ratnagiri District and the Andhashraddhaa Nimoolan Samiti, people attended the camp, completely ignoring their appeal. Such camps were blatantly held in Kanakavali, in Sidhudurga district, Masoor, Dahivadi, Khandala, Phaltan and Medha in Satara District and several places in Pune and Solapur.

The ANS tried to oppose this unashamed cheating, vehemently. Many other organizations helped the ANS branches active in the respective districts in confronting the camp managers. In Kolhapur, the 'Janaswasthya Dakshata Samiti', an organization active in the field of social health and ANS had demanded that the government investigate the use and aftereffect of this medicine on the eyes of people and save them from the possible damage. But the Government Health Department did not care. The District Commissioner, Manukumar Shrivastav and the Inspector of Police, Madhavrao Sanap did not do anything whatsoever. Every department would shirk from the responsibility and pass it on to some other department. Then ANS took a firm stand against this fraud, first in Kolhapur and then in all other places.

I met with the District Commissioner, Manukumar Shrivastav on 10th September 1997 along with some of our activists, and explained our stand in this connection. Our stand was: 'The government have declared to provide health facilities to all by the year 2000. But people like the Gurav Brothers are dabbling with people's health while the District Commissioner looks on. This is not correct or acceptable. The medicine used by these brothers should be analyzed and they should be allowed to continue their treatment only when it proves not only harmless but also beneficial for eye ailments.' We had a plan ready which we submitted to the District Commissioner. Gurav Brothers should administer their medicine on a few selected patients suffering from eye ailments under supervision of eye specialists. If the patients are cured of their ailment and the medicine proves effective, only then should the brothers be allowed to continue their treatment. We also demanded that the name of the plant from which the medicine is made be revealed to the public. Whether it possesses any medicinal property for the treatment of eye ailments at all can be verified with the help of Botanical and Ayurvedic sciences. If the brothers are scared that revealing the name of the plant amounts to giving up their business secret and adversely affect their occupation, then ANS is prepared to arrange to provide them with a temporary patent for their medicine. We also brought to their notice that treating patients with any medicine that has not undergone all the essential processes of validation is a culpable crime under the 1954 'Drugs and Magic Remedies Act'.

The District Commissioner did not seem to be in favour of taking any positive action. He agreed only to prohibit this treatment till the reports of the tests were available. This report, in fact, was not much of use because the medicine was Ayurvedic and made of plant leaves. So all that can be verified was whether the medicine is harmful. The compulsory process that every allopathic medicine has to undergo before being brought into the market does not apply to traditional Ayurvedic medicine made from plants. However although it was not possible to take action against Gurav Brothers on this account, they were surely guilty of producing medicine on large scale without government authorization and their bogus treatment without any proper medical certification. Since the government evaded taking action, Gurav Brothers started their business again after a short gap.

A delegation from Kushire arrived at the District Collector's office while we were holding a meeting with him. In their opinion 'Gurav Brothers' discovery was a great boon for humanity. It would ease government's responsibility regarding health at least as far as eye care is concerned. Moreover people opt for this treatment on their own responsibility just like those who eat Gutakha (a popular tobacco product). When government does not ban the harmful Gutakha, why then should it ban this harmless medicine?' But their real purpose was something quite different. They said that because of the success of Gurav Brothers' medicine, many others have started eye treatment claiming that they too have the knowledge of it. So they had come to request the collector to put an end to the bogus business of these imposters. What had happened was that one Baliram Chaugule living in the village Pohale, close to Kushire had claimed that it was he, who first discovered the medicine. He too, was organizing camps in the Konkan area. He too could not answer many questions like: - what is the expiry period of this medicine? Why is the colour of the medicine different at different times? Are these medicinal plants available at any places other than the mountain of Jyotiba near Panhala? Etc. Like Gurav Brothers, he too refused to give a sample for examination to the government. His camps too were overcrowded and many NGOs and political parties vied with each other to help this supposedly humanitarian campaign without giving a thought to its authenticity. ANS demonstrated against such camps in Kanakavali (district Sindhudurga) and Jaysingpur (district Kolhapur). Some likeminded organizations and ophthalmologists supported ANS. But the mad rush for treating eyes with the untested medicine did not abate. People could not understand why ANS is obstructing this so called good work.

In Satara District this questionable activity started at several places simultaneously. Despite the disappointing experience of the Kolhapur district administration, I went to see the district Police Superintendent, Meera Boravankar along with some eye specialists. I pointed out that curing all sorts of eye ailments with just one drop of a single medicine is a miraculous and supernatural treatment. The law provides for strict action against such treatment. I also pointed out that a coconut or cash in lieu of the coconut collected from every individual totals up to several thousand rupees per day in every camp. Dr. Saravate, the eye specialist who accompanied our delegation explained how badly the medicine can and already has affected some

patients. We also brought to her notice that the Ophthalmologists' Organization of Maharashtra have publicly denounced it and demanded that action be taken on the perpetrators of this crime.

Surprisingly the Superintendent of Police in Satara District, unlike those of other districts was convinced and promptly issued a circular to all police stations as follows.

No. /364/97

Satara,

27th October 1997

Sub:-Re stopping illegal treatment of eyes

Circular

In various parts of Satara district, camps for treatment of all eye ailments are being conducted on large scale. The person who treats the patients has no medical certificate. Just one drop of the medicine is put into the eyes of the patient, once a week, whatever is the disease. This medicine is neither licensed nor produced by medical experts. This treatment has been publicized as some divine miracle. Propagating any treatment in this manner is a cognizable crime under 'the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act, 1954. Similarly to accept money or things from patients for such treatment is plain deceit. The patient is likely to lose his vision by such treatment. Chiefs of all police stations should investigate thoroughly and take appropriate preventive action against those persons who offer this illegal treatment. Similarly if the ANS activists contact the police station in connection with this treatment or make a complaint in this regard, they should be given complete co-operation and proper action should be taken promptly.

By order

for Police Superintendent, Satara.

Copy to all police Stations, etc. etc. Satara.

This circular proved an effective weapon for us not only in Satara but in all other districts like Pune, Solapur, Usmanabad, Nagar etc. of Maharashtra, wherever this illegal act was spreading. Our activists met with the Chief Police Officers of the

concerned place with a copy of this circular and requested them to issue similar circulars. With the help of such circulars we successfully closed down one camp after another. However in the Kolhapur district no such circular was ever issued.

The crowds gathering at Kushire for the treatment of eyes by the so called 'medicine that brings the dead eyes to life' (Netra Sanjeevani) dwindled but at the cost of efforts, time, wisdom and money of innumerable people!

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

Translated by *Suman Oak*

Racial Differences

The whole world over, there are confrontations between sections of mankind defined by a difference of race, nationality, economic philosophy, religion or language so that one is not the 'neighbour' to the other. These more or less arbitrary differences among peoples who are members of a single biological species are terribly dangerous, and nowhere more so than here in the United States, where the most perilous confrontation is between white and black.

Next to the population problem generally, mankind faces no danger greater than this confrontation, particularly in the United States. It seems to me that more and more, each year, both whites and blacks are turning, in anger and hatred, to violence, I see no reasonable end to the steady escalation but an actual civil war.

In such a civil war, the whites, with a preponderance of numbers and an even greater preponderance of organized power, would in all likelihood 'win'. They would do so, however, at an enormous material cost, and I suspect, and at a fatal spiritual one. Is the privilege of feeling hatred so luxurious that it is worth the material and spiritual hell of a white-black civil war? If the answer is really yes, one can only despair.

Isaac Asimov

(For the Indian context substitute Hindu for white and Muslim for black)

Reporting Puttaparthi Saibaba

About three-and-a-half hours from Bangalore, past farmers' fields and some hills, a small village came into view. The rural area gradually gave way to an airstrip, where a private jet was parked, and then to uptown buildings—resorts, hotels and a huge, pink building, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram, a 'super specialty hospital' designed by English architect Dr Keith Critchlow, close to the Sri Sathya Sai Hill View Stadium, inaugurated in November 2006 by then President of India APJ Abdul Kalam, who also happens to be a well-regarded nuclear scientist.

This is Puttaparthi, a small town in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh spread over approximately ten square kilometers. The names of almost all hotels and shops start with 'Sai.' Pictures of Sathya Sai Baba are everywhere—on all shop hoardings, on the backs of auto-rickshaws, in lifts and telephone booths and even inside the Puttaparthi police station and the post office. The pictures also carry prominent Sai Baba-isms: 'Help Ever, Hurt Never,' 'Love is God, Live in Love,' 'Unity, Purity and Divinity,' 'Love All, Serve All,' and so on. With his benevolent teachings, his emphasis on communal harmony, and his numerous social work projects, Sai Baba, everything in the village appears in line with Sai Baba's worldview. There are many massage parlours—Sai Baba himself claims to be a "masseur healer." Given his aversion to alcohol and tobacco, cigarettes and liquor are sold only secretly. But you can find several paan shops—Sai Baba is a paan (betel leaf and nut) eater, as his stained teeth also suggest. Almost all restaurants are vegetarian, mirroring Sai Baba's philosophy that "meat eating fosters animal qualities in man making him descend to seems like Puttaparthi's own deity. Coming here to meet and follow one of the world's most influential living gurus—although it didn't involve an undercover investigation—turned out to be one of my most taxing assignments. I was advised by many former devotees, and explicitly warned by his current disciples, not to write critically about the spiritual leader whose followers include the President of India, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, the founder of the Hard Rock Café and legions of the Indian social elite.

At Hotel Sai Renaissance, where I stayed, the staff dutifully advised me what wasn't permitted at the ashram. "Please deposit your camera and phone, and also the

pen I can see in your pocket,” said the middle-aged man in a stern voice, as if he was part of Sai Baba’s security team.

Just to make sure I got the message, the notice board at the entrance of Sai Baba’s ashram, the Sai Kulwant Hall, warned that phones, tape recorders and cameras were not allowed. Not even a pen. Thankfully, I was carrying none.

Sathya Sai Baba, which roughly translates as the ‘real Sai Baba,’ claims to have been born Sathyanarayan Raju on 23 November 1926, though proof of his actual birth date is hard to come by. In October 1940, he claimed that he was an incarnation of the Sai Baba of Shirdi, a guru from Maharashtra who lived until 1918 and was revered by Hindus and Muslims. These days, he claims to be the creator of the universe, Krishna, Christ, Jehovah and Allah, all in one.

I wanted to find out why and how Sai Baba’s millions of followers, mainly Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, believe in his divinity even decades after numerous former devotees went public with accusations of sexual abuse of boys and male adults, massive cover-ups and even murder. These allegations have made Sathya Sai Baba a regular on numerous cult watch websites like rickross.com and factnet.org, where former members tell surprisingly similar stories. In the face of such overwhelming evidence of malfeasance, how does faith among the denizens of Sai Baba’s Puttaparthi fiefdom remain so strong?

At the Sai Kulwant Hall, over 10,000 people—men, women and children, locals and foreigners—were singing bhajans in Telugu, praising Hindu gods, mainly Shiva, Rama and Ganesha, and occasionally Sathya Sai Baba. Clad in a saffron robe, Sai Baba was sitting on a red padded wheelchair, referred to as his throne by his devotees. His signature afro framed his head. Two young men stood on either side of his ‘throne,’ which was placed between two four-foot tall golden lions on the slightly elevated stage. The roof above, painted in deep green with gold motifs and illuminated with crystal chandeliers, enhanced the grandeur of the daily darshan ceremony. Women were seated to his left, men to his right, on the black and white marble floor. Many in both wings prostrated themselves towards Sai Baba.

The frail-looking Sai Baba was quiet, with no expression on his wrinkled face. Occasionally, he patted his thigh to the beat of the bhajans. Carrying a white handkerchief in his left hand, he often wiped his mouth and nose, his right hand moving

rarely, as if partially paralysed. His two volunteers would often kneel down to whisper in his ears or listen to him, as if receiving divine instructions. After a few bhajans, his volunteers rang a five-foot golden bell. It was time to offer the concluding hymn to Sai Baba, called the Mangal arati, a Telugu version of Om Jai Jagadish Hare, a Hindu devotional song from the 1870s.

As the arati ended, Sai Baba's throne was wheeled towards his car, an imported silver Toyota Porte MPV parked adjacent to the stage. It bore the registration number AP 02 N 9000. The front door of the car slid open, making room for the wheelchair. As the volunteers escorted him to his car—to ferry him to his residence, barely 50 metres from the hall—an elderly man came to the stage to make an “important announcement.” “There will be a public meeting tomorrow evening to celebrate the anniversary of Bhagwan's [God's] mother [commemorated as Easwaramma Day].” He then proudly revealed that the President of India would also come to “seek Bhagwan's blessings.” The devotees applauded but dispersed minutes after Sai Baba's departure—no one else matters in Puttaparthi but the 84- year-old Swami.

After darshan, I went to the Sai Towers Restaurant for supper. I was offered the only table with a vacant chair. A couple from Hong Kong, Allan and Linda Yeoh, Catholics by birth but Sai Baba's devotees for 15 years, were in the middle of their meal. After pleasantries, the couple began to minister to me. “Swami came into our lives in 1995,” said the fair, well-dressed Allan. His wife Linda, a fashionable woman, showed me her necklace and said it was materialised by Sai Baba—with a wave of his hand, Sai Baba miraculously creates items such as watches, rings, necklaces and vibhuti (holy ash) and gifts them to his devotees.

Allan, a barrister, tells me he currently sits on the boards of several businesses in Hong Kong. Both he and Linda became devotees after reading a book on Sai Baba, *The Embodiment of Love*. Linda said she was “overwhelmed with love,” something that she had “always craved for.” “It was not something psychic, which is too limited a word to describe my feelings,” she said. “Baba is not just any other human being; he is Bhagwan.” Allan is among very few people who appear on stage with Sai Baba and have been asked to share their views during a darshan gathering.

Allan then told of his friend in Hong Kong, whom he identified as Phillip, also a Catholic. Telling stories of Sai Baba's miracles to newer devotees is routine in

Puttaparthi, and is encouraged by senior devotees for the expansion of Sai Baba's 'kingdom.' So Phillip wanted to see God, continued Allan. When he was a child, his Catholic schoolteacher hit him on his knuckles until they bled as punishment for refusing to believe in God until he saw him. Years later, when he was in Puttaparthi for darshan, Sai Baba came to him, touched his knuckles and asked, "Does it still hurt?" When Phillip looked at Sai Baba, he asked him if he was happy to see God (Sai Baba). "Phillip cried, recalling the day at school when he was hit on his knuckles."

Broaching Puttaparthi's most taboo topic, I reminded Allan, "Sai Baba has been accused of sexually molesting children and faking miracles." Though a little uncomfortable, Allan seemed sensible enough to at least attempt to answer my questions. He said he saw vibhuti coming from Sai Baba's palm and "it was not an illusion. These allegations [of sexual abuse] are not a big deal."

The devotees in Puttaparthi are brainwashed, agrees Narendra Nayak, the national president of the Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations. "The reports of so-called healing may be in cases with a psychosomatic element. As for investigations into the so-called phenomena of materialisation, he has been asked many, many times to let us investigate that under foolproof conditions. But we have not been allowed to do so."

Even without a controlled environment, Sai Baba's miracles don't stand up to real scrutiny. On 29 August 1992, Sai Baba inaugurated a community hall in Hyderabad in the presence of then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and other dignitaries. Sai Baba materialised a chain for the building's architect. One of the cameras placed by the government-owned Doordarshan news channel caught Sai Baba's personal assistant passing over the chain to him. But the director of Hyderabad Doordarshan, Appa Rao, "personally directed that all copies of the tapes be destroyed." (Deccan Chronicle, 23 November 1992) However, independent television producers who had also captured the day's events widely circulated the recording in Hyderabad. Today, there are over a dozen videos on YouTube exposing Sai Baba's fake miracles.

More serious allegations surfaced in June 1993 when four of Sai Baba's young devotees reportedly tried to kill him. At 10:30 pm, as Sai Baba prepared for bed, the four, carrying daggers hidden in cloth, sought to enter his bedroom (The Times of India, 7 June 1993). Four other devotees serving as bodyguards tried to obstruct them, and

the intruders stabbed two bodyguards to death. Sai Baba pressed an alarm button, alerting Puttaparthi police. Over 1,000 devotees living in the ashram crowded the main building. Heavily armed police arrived and, 'in self defence' killed the four intruders who only had daggers.

The encounter raised serious questions. Most notably, why did the four slain devotees plan to kill Sai Baba? And what exactly were their grievances? No one is sure and answers will likely prove hard to find. "The matter is purely internal and we do not wish to have any law enforcement agency investigating into it," said Indulal Shah, chief functionary of the Sri Sathya Sai World Trust, to The Hindu.

In December 1993, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) registered a case against the Puttaparthi police for shooting the four men to death. In a statement to the local court on 30 December, the CID pointed out that the police had tampered with the crime scene, shifting the dead bodies to support the official police version of events. As detailed in the BBC documentary, the case was eventually dropped through the intervention of the Central government.

On Easwaramma Day, my second morning in town, I left my phone, pen and camera in the room and started for the ashram where hundreds of devotees had lined up before the gate at 5:00 am so they could sit closer to Sai Baba. I removed my sandals and kept them on one of the racks placed outside the Sai Kulwant Hall. The ashram was crowded by 7:00. By 8:00, there were around 10,000 people, all seated with their hands folded in reverence. At 8:30, there was sudden commotion in the women's wing. Sai Baba was to distribute saris to women and lemon rice and sweet pongal to all devotees, I was told. Women from Puttaparthi were desperate to enter the hall, pushing and pulling each other to be able to sit closer to the stage. Their shouts and shrieks sounded like rain falling on a tin rooftop and spoke volumes about the poverty of the local people.

By 9:00, the crowd had swelled to around 15,000. Finally, Sai Baba's Toyota appeared. Swami wore a turmeric yellow robe, and was seated next to a clean-shaven, fair-skinned young man wearing spectacles with gold-coloured frames. Two police officials on duty were standing near the car, folding their hands—they looked more like devotees than police on duty. The car slowly came to the hall and the crowd began to fold their hands over their heads—Sai Baba was looking out of the rolled-down window,

but he wore the expressionless gaze of a man ravaged by old age. Moving through the hall, his car went out to the grave of his mother (Hindus also bury their dead in Puttaparthi). Outside the ashram, people gathered to get a glimpse of Sai Baba.

At 9:45 am, Sai Baba's car returned to the Sai Kulwant Hall. Local musicians began playing shehnai and mridang, their backs towards the crowd and facing the stage. A dark, stout young man came and sat next to me. "Do you like Swami?" he asked. Not wanting to give a clear-cut answer, I replied, "I am a newcomer." He introduced himself as Shiva. "My actual name is Adi, but people call me Shiva. I drive an auto-rickshaw."

He was from the same village as Sai Baba. "I had no job, but Swami's brother wrote a letter to the ashram, requesting them to give me a job," he said. "All I have is because of Swami. He gives rice and dal to all the poor people of the village once a week."

Shiva later became my guide. Pointing to a man wearing white trousers and shirt and holding a cellphone, Shiva said the man had been a deputy inspector of police in Hyderabad, but he quit his job to serve Sai Baba. Then he pointed towards a longhaired foreigner, wearing white pyjama and kurta, with a trimmed black beard and moustache, talking to Allan Yeoh on the stage. "He is Isaac Tigrett, a big businessman who donated money for the Sathya Sai hospital that offers free treatment, including surgery, to all villagers."

Tigrett founded the Hard Rock Café and House of Blues. These days, however, the 62-year-old Tigrett lives in Sai Baba's ashram. He travels and gives discourses on the teachings, and is building a spiritual retreat centre, The Mystic Inn of the 7th Ray, "at the behest of his Master," as his personal website says. I had questions for Tigrett, who'd told the BBC that his faith wouldn't be shattered even if the accusations against Sai Baba proved true. Tigrett, like Yeoh, occupied the inner wing of the Sai Kulwant Hall, close to the stage with Sai Baba, where only devotees with special identity cards and wearing white clothes were allowed. I waited for him after the darshan gatherings, but he disappeared each time, perhaps using a special exit. Allan Yeoh suggested that I could talk to him if I came across him in the street. But that never happened.

Having eaten lemon rice and sweet pongal for breakfast, I left the hall and looked for my sandals on the rack. They weren't there, most likely stolen. I walked to my hotel,

around 500 metres from there, barefoot, hoping that people wouldn't take it as a mark of devotion for Sai Baba.

I explained to the man at the front desk why I was barefoot. "It's good, Mr Arora," he said. "Losing sandals is considered auspicious, signifying that Satan has fled your life."

"Never mind," I said, and went to my room.

The devotees flocked the Sai Kulwant Hall again at 4:00 pm for the evening function. Sai Baba came at around 5:00 pm, this time without the car, with two devotees pushing his wheelchair. With Sai Baba close enough to touch, there was remarkable excitement in the crowd. A middle-aged man, standing next to me, a teacher of history in a local university, threw his bag down to promptly fold his hands in worship of Sai Baba. "We are very lucky today; this is an unusual darshan," said the man, a devotee for 20 years. Sai Baba went close to the women devotees, who tried to touch his 'lotus feet,' a Buddhist symbol of devotion. He came to the men's wing, cutting across the crowd, getting closer to the devotees. They too touched his feet and folded their hands.

Sai Baba took his place on the stage and the chanting of Om began, followed by bhajans. Sai Baba was quiet, as usual. Undergraduate students from the Sri Sathya Sai University enacted a play depicting the lives of Sai Baba's parents. After the play ended, at around 6:30 pm, a microphone was taken to Sai Baba, and people applauded, hoping to hear the voice of their Swami. I was not surprised that Sai Baba did not speak a word. A video of Sai Baba's 83rd birthday celebration clearly showed his struggle with the symptoms of old age: he was barely able to speak and forgot the name of one of his closest associates. Most of the people in the video laughed, but seemingly very few saw the god losing his memory as a reason to question his divinity.

Instead, the microphone was removed and given to a professor from the university, who, standing behind a podium, announced again that the President of India would be coming to seek 'Bhagwan's' blessings the following day.

There is no lack of powerful, high-profile people cutting across political parties and spheres, professing their faith in Sai Baba. Justice PN Bhagwati, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India in 1985 and 1986, calls him "divinity incarnate" in Baba is God in Human Form: Experiences of Divinity of Bhagwan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. In the same book, Shivraj Vishwanath Patil, currently Governor of Punjab and former Union

Home Minister, says, “He is the knowledge; He is the wisdom personified.” Shankarrao Bhavurao Chavan, former Chief Minister of Maharashtra for two terms and former Union Home and Finance Minister, says he has “no hesitation in saying, whatever position and status I have is purely because of Bhagwan’s blessings.”

In the evening, I was again at the Sai Towers Restaurant. The Yeohs were having their dinner—rice and curry. Sitting at the same table, I ordered uttapam, and our conversation began. “So we were talking about the allegations against Sai Baba?” I said. Allan and Linda seemed more frank that evening. At first, Allan admitted that it took Linda a few days to restore her faith after the BBC telecast the documentary on the allegations in June 2004. “But,” he carried on, “it [sex] is all about union; maybe Sai Baba established union with some of his devotees. I am not saying that the allegations were necessarily true, but what is the big deal even if they were true?” he asked. “So that won’t affect your faith in him?” I asked. “No, it will not,” he replied. “But is it fair that he tries to establish ‘union’ with some of their devotees without their consent?” I asked. “If he is God, how can it be wrong? It’s Ok,” he replied, rendering me speechless. What about his fake miracles? “I think sometimes Sai Baba does fake miracles,” Allan admitted. “That’s because God has a great sense of humour.” “Humour?” I asked. “Yes, he does it to further offend those who do not believe in him because their karmas are bad. He is God, and he doesn’t need to prove anything. It’s a fact that will remain whether someone believes in him or not.”

Acceptance of Sai Baba’s alleged criminal activities by his devotees is their personal choice. But, surely, a government cannot overlook such serious accusations. Several foreign agencies, including the US Department of State, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the German Office of Prosecutions, the French Sûreté (Security) and the British Home Office, officially acknowledged receiving complaints against Sai Baba, but they could do little as the alleged crimes were committed in India.

Legally, in India at least, charges against Sai Baba seem to have no traction. The petition of Indian-American exfollower Hari Sampath was dismissed by Indian Supreme Court Justices GB Pattnaik and RC Lahoti on 8 May 2001.

In her May 2008 petition to the Supreme Court, Kamini Jaiswal, Sampath’s lawyer, wrote that they were “sure not to get justice at the hands of the [Andhra Pradesh] state machinery” as Sai Baba had “practically mesmerised the system.” They

sought the court's direction to the CBI to conduct a free, fair and impartial inquiry. The CBI did not respond to the complaint filed by Hari Sampath and others, which is why Sampath approached the Supreme Court. "Hari Sampath disappeared after that," Jaiswal said. "He didn't respond to emails, and he did not even pay the lawyers' fees." Sampath wouldn't speak on the record. He did, however, send The Caravan the CBI report.

When I met Jaiswal in South Delhi in the summer of 2009, she still seemed close to the case. "I have no respect for a human being who claims to be God," she said. "Sai Baba has mesmerised people; it's all bogus."

My third day in Puttaparthi started early. People began lining up at the ashram at 5:00 am. The Sai Kulwant Hall, however, filled up only at around 7:30. By 8:45, the chanting began, chandeliers were lit and bhajans were sung. Sai Baba's car could be seen on the left side of the stage, where everyone's eyes were fixed, waiting for yet another darshan. However, at 9:30, the arati began, indicating that darshan would be granted only in the evening when the President arrived.

At 11:30, I went to the Public Relations Office beside the Sai Kulwant Hall. A middle-aged man wearing white trousers and shirt and a red vermilion streak on his forehead was sitting behind an office table. I introduced myself as a journalist.

"Can I meet an official of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust?" I asked politely. "Everything is mentioned in a booklet available for sale for 15 rupees. Buy that and you will know everything about the ashram," the public relations officer (PRO) suggested. "Can I meet Swami?" I asked. I expected his reply: "No, it's not possible."

But I didn't expect what followed: "But why don't you pray? He will appear in your vision and you can talk to him. And no matter where you are sitting when Sai Baba is giving darshan, if you pray enough, you may even be called for a private interview. This has happened hundreds of times here."

One doesn't need to spend much time in Puttaparthi to see the streets thronged. Seeing the mystical powers that the PRO described, however, presented more of a challenge. I'd hoped to witness something supernatural when Sai Baba received President Pratibha Devisingh Patil at the ashram. Patil arrived in her Ambassador with her daughter Jyoti Rathod, son-in-law Jayesh Rathod, and her granddaughter Vedika

Rathod. Accompanying Patil's family was Andhra Pradesh Tourism Minister J Geetha Reddy, a regular visitor to the ashram.

After a special tea party for the honoured guests, a media scrum ensued. Security at the ashram's main entrance began frisking visitors more strictly. I took a few pictures, fearing that I would soon be barred from using my camera. Sure enough, a volunteer security man came over and asked for my identity card. I showed my press card. "I don't know how you have been allowed to enter with your camera," he said, and left. Then another volunteer came running towards me and asked for my camera. I moved away slightly to pacify him and said, "I am sorry, but some other press people are also taking pictures." He insisted that I give my camera to him. I moved further away from him. He asked a policeman standing next to me to snatch the camera from me. He did, and gave it to the volunteer.

Holding my camera in his hand, he asked me to come to the hall's entrance. He gave the camera to another volunteer asking him to "delete all the pictures." I rushed to the entrance and asked for my camera. "No, I've been asked to delete the pictures," he insisted. He switched on the camera and tried to locate the delete function but could not. As a crowd started gathering around me, another security man came and asked his colleague to return the camera so the crowd would disperse. He did, and I merged with the throng.

By then, the President was about to leave. Wearing a golden sari with broad maroon borders draped over her head, President Patil briefly appeared on the stage with her two official escorts, who slowly walked with her towards the car. She waved at the devotees as she slid into the Ambassador. Then Sai Baba entered the stage amid the chanting. The devotees seemed less enthusiastic, perhaps because they wanted to see Sai Baba and Pratibha Devisingh Patil together. After the arati, Sai Baba left the stage, again without speaking a word or performing a miracle.

The whole encounter recalled an earlier conversation with the media guy. He'd advised me to read Sai Baba's Sandeha Nivarini: Clearance of Spiritual Doubts.

Sai Baba's teachings on doubt are unequivocal. "Do not admit doubt in you...The venom of doubt...Doubt is death...A component of the Raakshasa (demonic) nature." And as Allan Yeoh told me, "Baba says, 'It's heart to heart, one to one.' You don't have to listen to others." His wife Linda also explained how she overcame her doubts after

watching the BBC documentary: “I just said I would look at my personal experience, and not what others are alleging.” For Sai Baba, this means losing only the ones who have personal grievances with him. The rest of his flock remains intact.

Vishal Arora

Courtesy: Internet

Intellectual class

Whether you accept the theory of a great man as the maker of history or you don't, this much you will have to concede, that in every country the intellectual class is the most influential class, if not the governing class. The intellectual class is the class, which can foresee; it is the class, which can advise and give lead. In no country does the mass of the people live the life of intelligent thought and action. It is largely imitative and follows the intellectual class. There is no exaggeration in saying that the entire destiny of a country depends upon its intellectual class. If the intellectual class is honest, independent and disinterested, it can be trusted to take the initiative and give a proper lead when a crisis arises. It is true that intellect by itself is not a virtue. It is only a means and the use of means depends upon the ends that an intellectual pursues. An intellectual can be a good man but he can easily be a rogue too. Similarly an intellectual class may be a band of high-souled persons, ready to help, ready to emancipate erring humanity or it may be a gang of crooks or a body of advocates of a narrow clique, from which it draws its support.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar

Chicken Bones and Black Magic

I have campaigned against superstitions for several decades now and am convinced that it is the single most destructive force in India's development.

Let me start with a small piece of advice, just in case. If one fine day you get to know that some tantrik, generously paid by your arch enemy to kill you, has managed to lay his hands on a used handkerchief or a strand of hair or yours, don't panic. Here is the counter spell that can save your life: just laugh. For whatever mantras he may chant over a midnight fire in the local burial ground and whatever cruelties he may commit to your handkerchief, it cannot harm you as long as you are not afraid. If you are afraid, yes, you could die - out of fear that is.

In March 2008, I had an opportunity to prove my point. During a panel discussion live on India TV about "tantra power versus science" my opponent Pandit Surinder Sharma, a well-known TV-tantrik, boasted that it would take him just three minutes to kill whomever he wanted by the sheer power of his mantras. "Then kill me!" I challenged him. And he tried. That was the beginning of an unprecedented experiment. When I survived two exhausting hours of "Om lingalingalingalinga, kilikilikili....", the show was continued in an open air midnight special with the "ultimate destruction ritual", in which the tantrik fired off the full stock of his black magic arsenal. Finally he furiously crucified, massacred and burned the little clot of wheat dough that was meant to represent me. But all the tantra and mantra could not harm me. Of course not! How should abracadabra and chicken bones spell death?

Fear from freedom is looming large

We are living in a time where scientific and technological revolutions are dramatically changing the way we live and the way we think. With the fast and easy flow of information at our fingertip and the whole world just a call away, borders are opening, old monopolies and privileges breaking and social prisons crumbling. It's a good time to do away with the last balance of age old superstition and tribal rituals in our mind and to try to understand the world in its complexity. To take control of our lives and develop our own capacities, to be efficient, strong, confident, responsible – and happy. This is not only a personal affair, it is also the best way promote India growing into a developed country and unfolding its strong potential to take a leadership position in tomorrow's world order.

Many are ill prepared to cope with the challenging situation. For them, all changes create a feeling of insecurity and fear. People who could not overcome their childhood fears and weaknesses tend to remain trapped lifelong in a bizarre world where ghosts and spirits are lurking behind every shadow. They are the ideal customers for tantriks and babas, who unscrupulously exploit fear and insecurity.

Blisters and a flush of enlightenment

I have been a spirited campaigner against superstition for several decades now, as I am convinced that it is the single most destructive force in people's lives and India's development. My encounters with "supernatural" charlatans enlist much more colourful figures and more dangerous situations than the "Great Tantra Challenge" on India TV. There were people like the fiery Balti Baba, who performed his fire tricks allegedly for the benefit of a top politician's re-election, when I exposed him. He got so furious that he tossed a huge burning mud pot on my face. Running TV cameras recorded my narrow escape. I got some minor blisters, but the baba burnt his hands down to the bones and hasn't been seen in public ever since.

Among all those sinister creatures, Pandit Suriner Sharma deserves a special place. As a somewhat sedate thinker he understood the consequences of our experiment in a nationally broadcast live programme too late. Killing nothing but his own career, he helped me – though against his will – to spark a flush of enlightenment in the minds of millions of viewers. I still receive touchy mails from people of all wages of life who found their way out of superstition that night. In case you missed the programme: you can see some clippings on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/rationalists>

Sanal Edamaruku

Courtesy: The Times of India

Tracing the History of Charwak Philosophy

The book, *Charwak: History and Philosophy* is originally written in Marathi by a noted historian Prof Sadashiv Athavale (1923 -2003). Amongst the well-known Maharashtrian historians like K N Sane, Vasudevshastri Khare, Rajwade, Sardesai, Parasanis, Bhave, Apate, Shejwalakar, G H Khare, Setumadhav Pagadi, etc who enriched the history in general and Maratha history in particular by writing in vernacular language, Prof Sadashiv Athavale has a distinct place amongst them. Due to his frank and pragmatic insight about the historical personalities and painstaking efforts he put to support his statements and conclusions, he did not get much acclaim as expected while he was alive nor posthumously. In fact he gave new dimension to the traditional biographies like Rana Pratap, Chhatrasaal of Bundelkhand, Krishna Devarai of Vijayanagar etc. and educated the scholars of Maharashtra. However amongst his interest and books written, the research paper on Charwak appears to be the one of the most acclaimed and popular essay recognized by historians. We must thank Ms Suman Oak for translating the book in English in verbatim and Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee for making it available to non-Marathi speaking readers. Author tracks the historical aspects of Charwak Philosophy in this lucid volume of 100 odd pages.

There are very many misconceptions about Charwak even among rationalists. Some think that there was a person whose name was Charwak which is not true. One will find lot of bitter criticism and outright condemnation by supporters of Veda and Hindu priests about Charwak philosophy. Prof Athavale makes it clear that rather than a person and his teachings this was a philosophy of materialism which can be traced back to ancient India. The book makes an attempt to trace the origin, development and rise and fall of this philosophy. According to the author, Lokayatvaad and Charwak philosophy are one and the same and are two sides of the same coin.

Charwaks in Ancient India

Author makes it very clear about what he meant by history. We generally have a totally wrong conception about history. For us history means genealogies of dynasties, battlefields, maps and strategies, chronological details of particular kingdom, region or society. This has still been imbibed in our minds. However sensible people now think of history as the vision of entire human life. This book is a small chapter in the long history

of trends of reflective deliberations in ancient India. The ancient period begins from the time Sanhitas were compiled and goes up to 13th – 14th century AD. It is quite surprising that the ancient Indian studies covered all fields of knowledge; not confining to only religious knowledge but also knowledge of economics, erotic science, medical science and of course knowledge of the Brahma – the supreme. This is in fact the creative literature in the history. This has been made available to us by many oriental and occidental scholars who meticulously studied, interpreted and presented us the conclusions. However the most neglected of this rich and veritable literature appears to be Charwakvaad, the secular – materialist philosophy enunciated in ancient India.

Human beings are quite inquisitive all along the history. They were pondering over a number of questions: who created the animate and inanimate universe? How does it run? Is it controlled? Who controls it and how and why does that entity (God, Supreme) do it? Why was I born? Why I am living? Why am I going to die? What is the meaning of life? Why should we live? From where did I have arrived? Where I am going? How am I related to creator and controller? Is there any creator or controller? From where has the surrounding world come? and so on so forth. This innate desire to know gave birth to various doctrines like theism, atheism, determinism, law of chance, fatalism, spiritualism, materialism, humanism etc. We Indians felt that the quest for the Brahma will answer all these questions. But a few amongst us were not satisfied with this Vedant philosophy and hence they interpreted in some other way. Though the Vedant philosophy was popular in ancient India, it does not mean that others were wrong. This philosophy of minority is generally termed as Charwak philosophy which had been existing all along since the time when the ancient Indian Rishis visualized the Richas some 3-4 thousand years BC.

The philosophy of Charwaks has many extraordinary characteristics. They were the first to refute the validity or legitimacy of Vedas. They stressed that the Vedas are not Apourusheya (i.e. of superhuman origin). They cannot be divine or made by god. Nor do they have inner validity of their own. On the contrary they are the creation of foolish but shrewd men – priests and Bhikshuks, living on religious offerings. Agnihotra, Shraaddha, the cycle of births and deaths, heaven and hell, the fruits of our deeds and all such conceptions are their sweet fabrications that ensure the gullible into their design. Chasing the impossible objectives like Moksha (liberation) and Nirvana

(salvation) is as good as wasting one's life. The life on this earth is real and human beings should enjoy it and live happily. All the caste and colour discrimination is unscientific. The value of fidelity and slave like mindset in relation to the husband forced on the women are weapons of the cruel men to subjugate women. In support of these ideas author had reproduced the Sutras which were handed over to us from 14th -15th centuries AD.

According to author, Charwak philosophy as we know, it can be tracked down almost Rigved period. Though Rishis (and people!) believed in gods, deities, Yadnyas, the benefit of performing Yadnyas etc, there were some sizable Rishis expressed diverse thoughts. Plain materialism was in the vogue. Many Pandits openly refuted rebirth and maintained that death means total extinction of a person. In fact there were broadly three schools of philosophical thoughts: Vedant, Sankhya and Lokayata. Vedant was theistic and spiritual; Sankhya and Lokayata were atheistic and materialistic. In fact we may find derogatory and dismissive references to Lokayata in Vedant literature. Most of them were in a messy and disorganized form. In fact Charwak Darshan was not systematically enunciated and could not be called a logical rational philosophy that Lokayatya Shaastra is.

It is indisputable that Charwak philosophy with all its Sutras came into being before the Buddha period. In fact, Bouddhas treated Charwak/Lokayata philosophy as Vitandvaad (argumentative) rather than Praman Shaastra – the science of validation. Jain Granthas too were adapting this line of thinking. Even Brahmanic literature like Ramayan, Mahabhashya (Patanjali), Arthashaastra (Chanakya) also mention about Lokayata. Arthshaastra considers Lokayata to be discipline of investigation (Anvikshiki Vidya). If it is so then it cannot be Vitanda. Supports for antiquity of the Lokayata philosophy are a plenty. First it is in the Vedas and Upanishads, later in the Bouddha and Jain literature, i.e. from 6th century BC to 2nd century AD. In fact the word Charwak comes into picture in the 6th century BC.

Who is Charwak?

Generally we have curiosity that who that Charwak in whose name the famous atheist philosophy is propagated. Had there been any Charwak in the ancient past? According to Prof Athavale, this has been extensively debated and there is no evidence on the basis of which any decisive conclusion can be drawn. No biographical

information regarding a person named Charwak the philosopher, who propounded Charwak Darshan, is provided in any available Sanskrit or vernacular ancient literature. Many writers play upon the word Charwak and tried to explain it. Some have made a pun on the word Charwak. According to fun makers Charwaks are those who believe only in Charvan (eating) and do not care about sin and merit. Another interpretation is they are Charu Waks; who have a sweet tongue.

In fact there was character of this name in the play *Prabodhanchandrodaya*. Madhvacharya too refers Charwak as a proper noun instead of adjective and describes him as *Nastik Shiromani*. In Mahabharat Charwak appears as demon. In the history of Charwakvaad there are many personalities who adhered to this philosophy. Ajit Keshkambali, Brihaspati, Bharadwaj, Pradeshi, Virochan, King Kuruchandra are some of the names appear as charwajvaadi in the ancient Vedic, Bouddha and Jain literature.

Distinctive Nature

In the ancient days all Vedic, Bouddha and Jain philosophers proceeded to solve the mystery of the universe. They raised the questions in this regard and tried to answer them. Every one thought that their conclusions are logically correct. However they seem to slip somewhere. But one philosophy stands out and shows no such weakness and again it is *Charwak Darshan*.

Charwakvaad's logic and its way of examining validity are quite extraordinary. They reject all religious books and all sacred statements. When they reject the validity of the Word, they honestly stick to their statements. They do not have faith in any Shruti, Smruti or in any Tirthankar (Jain) or Tathagat (Bouddha). They don't start their discussions by bowing down before their founder Brihaspati. Word testimony has no place in their logic. They even refused the analogies. For them sense of perception is base for their inference.

They refute all deceptive validation like authority of Veda, attempts by elders, and advocated uncompromising rationalism. They are the founders of rationalism. They gave us a specific method of reasoning. Today's advance logic takes up exactly the same stand as was adopted by Charwaks. Their science of validation was meant for the smooth running of world affairs and daily routines of the individual and social life. Can a rationalist student in search of truth takes up a stand other than Charwak philosophy?

As typical Indians (who believes in Sanatan dharma) firmly believe that the Vedas and Upanishads have amassed all knowledge; they contain all scientific discoveries in them; they have already revealed all the truths regarding human life and there remains nothing more to be said. And we expect others to agree with this. All the Sankhya, Naiyayik, Vaishishik, Vedant and other philosophers were engaged in deep and incisive thinking; but all their thinking concentrated on problems of the universe, its nature, nature of life and external world. They needed some comfort to carry out their studies without interruption. This peaceful atmosphere, they must have thought, could be assured by maintaining status quo. So they were interested in keeping Varnashram and caste system alive and also insisted that people should adhere. They never felt need for more justice in the social life of those days. They might have said that killing animals for sacrifice might pollute Yadna rituals. But they did not doubt about the fruits of rituals nor rejected the Yadna culture. Manusmruti was the guide and philosopher to all of them.

The Jains and Bouddhas opposed the Yadna system and shook the concept of priest's superiority. They also realized that instead of Vedic rituals, good conduct on part of the people will improve the social condition. But could they do away with caste discrimination with success? Jain religion has survived with all its defects of Brahminic religion – castes, untouchability and all. The Bouddhas have almost disappeared from India. The Bouddhas and Jains had suggested that it is possible to replace the traditional discriminatory social system that is dominated by the priestly class with some alternative method. But when we try to find out what they were contemplating our illusions wither away. Nirvan did not pull out of the quagmire of the concepts of rebirth, heaven and hell. They did not tell common man how to lead a rich and happy life. For the common man to live a secular worldly life, he needs good food, good clothes and healthy sensuous fulfillment. But when some great soul tells him that the chasing of such a goal is wrong, he is perplexed. Their teachings humiliate the humble innocent people. In fact priests were replaced by Muni and Bhikshu.

Charwaks' criticism of Vedas was altogether different. When they reject the Vedas, they rejected the testimony of the Word too. They were very sincere and truthful to their stand. They spoke very clearly without any ambiguity. They rejected the divine

and eternal nature of Vedas. Charwaks demonstrated how ridiculously childish and foolish were the concepts on which the Vedic rituals are based.

The Jains and Bouddhas too had criticized Vedas like the Charwaks. But later they had to propagate theories of omniscience and attribute of possessing indisputable religious knowledge. They could not envision a happy prosperous life on this earth nor could they offer it to others. Only Charwaks could advocate explicitly that one should not rise above confounding concepts of heaven, Yadnayaag, penance, liberation, caste discrimination etc and do something useful and productive like agriculture, trade ... and lead a happy life. The Charwaks alone could take this firm stand that could lead to worldly life which would have made common man happy.

Scientific Base

The ancient Indian thinkers confronted with questions regarding life and surrounding world. Charwaks too entered into this intellectual arena, but their findings were altogether different than others. They tried to progress as directed by their logic of validation by direct sense perception. In fact this made their life very difficult. The theist philosophers found it very convenient to transfer it to the agency of everything that happens to be god and shirk all responsibility. For them everything is in Veda and if required interpret from Richa. Though Bouddhas had no faith in either god or Veda, they left all the unanswered questions alone. A kind of escapism was advocated. They did not bother about the soul, Atma and god etc, but in the same breath they believed in hundreds of previous lives.

According to Charwaks, knowledge that is perceptible to the senses is true knowledge. Any item of knowledge should be verifiable. The debate regarding Moksha, Brahma etc are meaningless. We should refrain from indulging in imagination. In fact they added fifth element Akash to the basic four elements viz, earth, water, light and wind. Charwaks analysed the concept of God in detail and concluded its non-existence.

Charwaks had thought about the science of life. Life originates when the elements combine in specific proportions. There is no property of intoxication in the elements from which the alcohols are made but their chemical mixture produces an altogether a new substance called wine. The elements like water, earth do not possess any vitality; they are not alive.

Charwaks were not prepared to accept the existence of Atma – soul beyond the body with vitality of a living being. A few of them accepted the concept as a convenience during the arguments. That did not mean that the soul survives after death and enters into another body. They even questioned that had any body ever seen a departing being going to the other world. Their opinion about god, origin of the universe, nature of the universe and biology are indications of their scientific outlook. The Charwaks were in fact propounded the rational, scientific way of thinking.

Moksha is Freedom

The ancient Indian philosophers deliberated on human life and aim of life. There were heated debates and criticism. Finally they could arrive at four objects of life: Dharma – religious duty; Arth – earning to sustain the family and self; Kama – enjoying the life and produce heirs; and Moksha – liberation. Moksha was of paramount importance for all Vedic, Bouddha and Jain thinkers, philosophers, writers and even poets. Most of the interpretations about what is Moksha are incredible; but all agree that it is the supreme goal of human life, it is noble and exalted thing to achieve, human beings should strive for nothing less than that and beyond that nothing remains to be achieved. The common burden of these philosophers is that man caught in the cycle of rebirths because of his ignorance. As such he should attain knowledge to escape from the chain of successive births and reach a blissful state.

In this regard Charwaks' first step was to free themselves of the idea of virtually endless chain of births and deaths. There was no place for previous lives or rebirths in Charwak philosophy. According to them man should live in such a way that in the end he will get peace and happiness. Considering the whole human life, the Charwaks tell us that happiness is possible only through activity, being involved in productive work. Charwaks had extolled the importance of freedom in the same sense as in the West, albeit several centuries ahead of them.

Value of Life

The popularly known Indian philosophy advocates that life here is worthless but there is no escape from it. Though Bouddhas and the Jains rejected the god and Vedas they too believe that life is full of grief and ultimate goal of human life is getting rid of thirst and desire.

Against this background, the couplets attributed to Charwaks यावज्जीवेत् सुखं जीवेत् ऋणं कृत्वा घृतं पीबेत्। भस्मीभूतस्य देहस्य पुनरागमनं कुतः ॥ ('enjoy as long as you are alive. Incur debts if you must enjoy. How can this body once reduced to ashes be reborn?') attracted severe criticism from all corners. In fact in the above couplet there is nothing objectionable except for the phrase incur debt if you must but enjoy. Asking to live happily appears to be acceptable; but incurring debts is dangerous. Would the Charwaks, who were quite sensible ever offer such advice to people? In fact these couplets were quoted out of context. The author gives full explanation about this and one must read it in original. As a matter of fact the original words - नास्ति मृत्युः अगोचरः - were replaced by Madhavacharya during later period to denounce Charwaks.

Charwaks never accepted the supernatural origin of Vedas. Men wrote Vedas. The Charwaks advocated hedonism and propagated enthusiastically. They never seen to be telling people to steal, cheat, plunder, pilfer or amass wealth through corruption. On the contrary they attacked religious hypocrisy. Their advice to people was to earn living by fair means of agriculture, trade, service etc. and live happily; achieve the two goals of life Arth and Kama; do not believe in the deceptive ideas of other world and fall prey to the bluffs of the shrewd and cunning priests. Such down to earth advice was of tremendous importance in the social life of ancient India.

Failure of Charwak Philosophy

The Charwak philosophy was propagated from the pre-Buddha period up to 15th century AD. During this long period this philosophy was always despised; ridiculed; not a word in its favour or in favour of its followers was spoken or written by any one any where. They were always referred as Nastiks. Bouddha philosophers called them Vitandak – excessively argumentative. In fact Arth Shaastra and Kama Shaastra were in reality aspects of Charwak philosophy. Yet Vatsayana, author of Kama Shaastra ridiculed Lokayatiks. However Indian philosophy advocating spiritualism in all walks of life, sometimes, acknowledged the arguments and redefined their concepts. They in fact used to study Lokayat Shaastra. Baring the mention of a few Charwak philosophers, not a single book written by any Charwak philosophers exist today. Everything which did not conform to spiritual philosophy just disappeared.

Though Charwakvaad is meant for the well being of the masses, but what has happened in reality? Charwaks have been telling for centuries not to remain enslaved to

the Vedas. But even today great scholars seek support for their opinions in the Vedas. Charwaks shouted themselves hoarse that god does not exist; Yagnas are meaningless and rituals are fraud. But even today common man is enslaved to them. They dissected the notions of both Atma and Moksha. Yet the never ending ranting about them has become a permanent character of Indian history. In fact theist philosophy was successful in creating negative opinion that Charwaks were all whimsical and licentious individuals. As a matter of fact Charwaks must have been a small group of honest, responsible, brave and dedicated individuals. They were not in a position to effectively shape the thought and conduct of Indians. And yet Charwakvaad deserves a place in the history of thought. Among all the philosophies that were enunciated in India Charwaks holds a singular place. Not only were they the most logical rationalist philosophers but also obliged others to become rational to some extent.

Prof Athavale had succeeded in bringing out the essence of this philosophy in this volume. His statements are often supported by the extensive references and he quotes Sanskrit shlokas in verbatim to support his interpretation. We must also be indebted to Ms Suman oak who translated and included the preface written by noted thinker Lakshmanshaastri Joshi who provides further evidences to support Prof Athavale's explanations.

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Unholy Acts of TTD

The richest Hindu temple trust in the world, the Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), the abode of Lord Balaji, is witnessing some of the most unholy acts of scandal and corruption.

The TTD, which receives annual donations from devotees in excess of Rs500 crore, has been rocked by multiple scams in recent months. Jewels and ornaments gifted by 16th century Hindu king Krishna Deva Raya have been found missing or not accounted for. Tickets meant for devotees have been used by politicians and powerful trustees for private profiteering. B Suresh, a camp clerk with TTD special officer Dharma Reddy's office, committed suicide on Thursday night, apparently under pressure from bigwigs. And gold coins minted from the offerings of devotees have been sold apparently without proper receipts.

With angry devotees raising their voices against the way the lord's wealth has been mulcted and mismanaged, the Andhra Pradesh government has appointed three bureaucrats — J Satyanarayana, IYR Krishna Rao, serving executive officer of the TTD, and V Nagi Reddy —to oversee the organisation's work. The tenure of the 11-member board of TTD trustees, led by Congress leader DK Adikeshavulu Naidu, has now been terminated.

An enquiry commissioned by the government found that seva tickets (which allow devotees to be present for some pujas for a price) were sold in black to VIPs and other moneyed clients through a manipulation of the online system.

Tickets priced at nominal rates of Rs 100-200 were found to have been sold for several thousands of rupees - obviously with the connivance of untrustworthy trustees. A report submitted to the government by the TTD's vigilance and enforcement department a few months back named 55 persons, including three board members, as complicit in these scams.

It recommended framing charges under IPC for breaching the trust of pilgrims. No action has been taken so far.

The alleged suicide of Suresh, the camp clerk, is being linked to pressure from bosses who wanted him to take the rap for the seva ticket scam. The police are yet to get to the bottom of this premature death.

However, the mother of all scams is still in the vaults of Lord Balaji: missing jewels, gems and ornaments. During Vijayanagar king Krishna Deva Raya's reign in the 16th century, the temple was gifted several pieces of jewellery studded with diamonds and other precious stones. Since then, thousands of devotees have been donating gold jewellery to the TTD. According to temple rules, the TTD as a trust has to accept the gifts and offerings and keep them in safe custody.

However, the jewellery has not been audited properly for several years. In fact, one P Seshadri, officer on special duty (OSD), has managed the Bokkasam (treasury) for over 10 years.

KV Ramana

Courtesy: DNA

Superstitions and Religion

- *Superstition is child of ignorance and mother of misery.*
- *Miracles are not only impossible but they are unthinkable by any man capable of thinking.*
- *Ignorance is the soil in which belief and miracles grow.*
- *Reason is the light, the sun, of the brain; it is the compass of mind.*
- *Priestly community produces nothing. They are parasites. They say: "Believe and give".*
- *The man who bows before an idol of wood or stone is just a fool as he prays to an imagined god.*
- *Religion cannot reform mankind because religion is slavery.*
- *Religion does not teach self-reliance, independence, manliness, courage, self-defense. Religion makes god a master and man the serf.*
- *Religion has never made man moral, temperate, industrious, honest and free. That man has never received any help from heaven, that all sacrifices have been in vain and all prayers have died unanswered in the needless air.*

RG Ingersoll

A.G.K. Murthy--Humanist Pioneer in Andhra

Avula Gopala Krishnamurthy, rather “A.G.K.” as he was more popularly and affectionately called, was born on April 29, 1917 at Mulpur village near Tenali of Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh. He hailed from a middle class agriculture family. He graduated in Law and Literature from Andhra and Lucknow Universities. He settled down for law practice at Tenali and made it a center of activities in the field of Humanism, influenced as he was by M.N. Roy.

For about 8 years he was in the forefront of the Radical Democratic Party in Andhra Pradesh, as secretary and member of its central executive. After the dissolution of the party, he was acknowledged as the foremost leader of the Radical Humanist movement in Andhra Pradesh until his death in 1967.

In 1949 he associated himself with such great rationalist personalities like Dr. R.P. Paranjape, Gora, C.N. Annadurai and S. Ramanathan in starting the Indian Rationalist Association. He was a member of the first working committee of the Indian Rationalist Association. The association's first conference was inaugurated by M.N. Roy. AGK inaugurated the 6th convention of the Rationalist Association held at Madras. Elected Vice President of the Association, he held office until his death in 1967 at the age of 49.

His passion for social reforms and compassion for the downtrodden were proverbial. He pioneered the backward class movement in Andhra. He was the champion and protagonist of inter-caste marriages. He officiated hundreds of such marriages. People used to gather in large numbers to hear his speeches on such occasions.

He was elected Municipal Chairman of Tenali and during his tenure, he laid roads and provided electricity in slum areas. He visited the USA in 1964 at the invitation of the US Government. The fanatic Hindus including the editor of Andhra Prabha Mr. Neelamraju Venkatasessaiah demanded the government to call him back when AGK commented that he would tell the truth about Vivekananda if some one asks for details in USA. During his tour in USA he made certain remarks against Jawaharlal Nehru which made the then ambassador B.K Nehru furious but he could not do anything. After his return from USA, AGK gave his impressions in public meetings which were hailed as

excellent assessment. He translated M.N. Roy's work "New Humanism" into Telugu and published "My Tour of the USA".

AGK studied Roy's principles thoroughly and extensively propagated them but did not blindly follow them. In fact, he propagated the principles scientifically. He did not accept Roy as a communist. AGK often said that Roy was afraid of the Communist Secret Police chasing him, as he knew well how they eliminated their opponents in the international communist movement. AGK used to heckle Roy for keeping the photo of Stalin in his drawing room even in the last days of Stalin.

AGK realized that Netaji turned to be a "Social fascist". When Subhas was defeated as president of Congress none received him in Lucknow but AGK received him and maintained cordial relations. AGK was studying postgraduate course in Lucknow and staying in hostel. He wrote that Netaji committed a blunder in seeking the support of and fascists in his fight against British imperialism.

AGK used to write articles in both small and big newspapers whichever was willing to publish them. He was popularly called a 'theoretician' in Radical circles. His general speeches were ferocious, and attracted special attention. Mr. Abburi Ramakrishna rao complained against AGK to M N Roy when AGK wrote bitter criticism against Gandhi during war days. When no magazine came forward to publish some of his thoughts, he launched a Radical magazine from Tenali during the Second World War.

He tried his best to bring several persons involved in social and women emancipation in Andhra region under the influence of Roy. As part of his endeavors, he could make the famous feminist writer Chalam meet Roy. However, it was a failure as Chalam was not fluent in English and did not have modern views on various subjects. Chalam could not rise to Roy's level of thinking.

AGK thought that a meeting of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy with Roy would be fruitful. Ramaswamy did not possess in-depth philosophical knowledge. In addition, he could not come out of Hindu mythologies and caste inequities. Hence, here also AGK was dissatisfied. Ramaswamy did not live long afterward and there was no occasion for AGK to try again for their meeting.

Humanist :By 1948, AGK played a prominent role at the national level in the Radical Humanist movement, worked together with Mr. Ramanathan, Vice - President and invited Annadurai from Tamil Nadu to Andhra Pradesh. He continued to be National Vice-President for about ten years. He wrote a number of articles and addressed several meetings. He propagated the thoughts of eminent humanists like Ingersol, Bradlaugh, Thomas Paine and several others in Andhra areas.

After Independence, AGK excelled as a full-time Radical. While practicing at Tenali as an advocate, he conducted many training camps and imparted knowledge to youth.

Marriages: He cultivated the art of delivering speeches at the time of marriages. He also organized several humanist weddings. Even people who did not agree with his ideas heard him in rapt attention.

Friend of Dalits: AGK prepared Dalits in Andhra Pradesh to fight for their rights. Former Chief Minister Sanjivaiah visited him frequently for advice. Many Dalit poets had the privilege of his doing the 'foreword' for their works. AGK waged a relentless fight against untouchability. On a visit to Vijayawada as Chief Minister, Sanjivaiah had to cancel his engagements at a Harijan Hostel located atop a hillock as he could not climb. When the reporter of Andhra Patrika, Telugu daily, brought the issue to AGK's notice by, AGK remarked that when Sanjivaiah could climb up to the position of Chief Minister, how was it he could not climb up to the Harijan Hostel on the hillock. Andhra Patrika carried a story on the subject. Reacting to it immediately, Sanjivaiah offered apologies to AGK. He later attended the hostel function. Sanjivaiah was a generous politician who received criticism in its true spirit. From Athota Venkata Ratnam to Jashua, many Dalit poets were AGK's friends.

Agitations for Secularism: The then Endowments Minister Kalluri Chandramouli spent Government funds in the name of renovation of temples lavishly. AGK wrote a number of articles and delivered speeches objecting to this and suggested that the Government should maintain a distance from religion. During the tenure of Pattabhi Ramarao as Education Minister, textbooks were nationalized and AGK opposed the move. In the 5th standard textbooks, a piece written by Viswanadha Styannarayana in which Budha was described as Satan was published. AGK agitated against it as a result of which the Government was forced to remove it from the textbook. This was a victory scored by

Humanists under the leadership of AGK against the State Government. Pattabhi Ramarao frequently entered into arguments with AGK but could not succeed.

Viswanadha Satyanarayana afraid to attend any meeting attended by AGK. He could not face the rational literary criticism of AGK. At a farewell meeting organized by the Advocates Association on the eve of his American tour, many requested AGK to lavishly praise Swamy Vivekananda but AGK said that he would state only the facts about Swamiji.

Andhra Prabha, under the editorship of Neelamraju Venkata Seshiah, started a big campaign seeking the recall of AGK. Many fundamentalists cried foul about his speeches in the States. AGK did not have an occasion to rebut their contentions.

Several Humanists right from M.V. Sastry used to consult AGK because of his position in the movement. Gopichand and others were afraid of AGK. People, who often change their views as easily as changing parties, were afraid of him.

A comprehensive book on AGK's efforts to propagate Humanist, secular and radical movements in Andhra is warranted.

AGK turned Tenali into an important Humanist center. From M.N. Roy to A.B. Shah, hundreds of Humanist leaders visited Tenali and had discussions with AGK. People acquainted with AGK felt that they were in the company of a great intellectual.

AGK edited Radical, Radical Humanist, Samiksha - all Humanist journals in Telugu published from Tenali. He also edited souvenirs on Tripuraneni Ramaswami, Etuduri Venkata Narasaiah and a few other literary giants in Telugu. He associated himself with famous journalists like Narla Venkateshwara Rao and influenced their thoughts. AGK turned out hundreds of Humanists through training camps and study centers.

Dr. N.Innaiah